THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COPING RESOURCES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CAREER RESOURCES OF GRADUATES

by

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DECLARATION

I, KERITH ANN ESTERHUIZEN, student number 30788234, declare that the dissertation entitled **"The relationship between the coping resources and psychological career resources of graduates"** is my own work, and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that ethical clearance to conduct the research has been obtained from the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, University of South Africa, as well as from the participating organisation.

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SUMMARY

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COPING RESOURCES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CAREER RESOURCES OF GRADUATES

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DEPARTMENT:Industrial and Organisational Psychology
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This study explored both the relationship between coping resources (as measured by the Coping Resources Inventory) and psychological career resources (as measured by the Psychological Career Resources Inventory) and also whether individuals from different gender and employment status groups (part-time work experience versus no work experience) differ significantly regarding their coping resources and psychological career resources. A cross-sectional survey design and quantitative statistical procedures were used to analyse the data which was obtained from a purposive non-probability sample of N = 197 early career unemployed, black graduates. The results showed significant positive associations between psychological career resources and coping resources. It also emerged that the male and female participants differed significantly with regard to their emotional, spiritual and physical coping resources and the psychological career resources of career harmonisers and career drivers. In addition, it was found that those participants who had part-time work experience displayed a significantly higher need for career venturing and also manifested higher behavioural adaptability than those who had no work experience. Recommendations for future research and practice were made.

KEY TERMS

Coping resources, psychological career resources, graduates, stress, school-to-work transition, career adaptability, early career

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CHAPTER 1: SCIENTIFIC OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

This dissertation focuses on the relationship between the psychological career resources and coping resources of young, early career, South African graduates in the school-to-work transition phase of their careers. In this chapter the research is contextualised, the problem statement formulated and the theoretical framework explained. The general and specific aims of the study are stated and the paradigm perspective defined. In so doing, the parameters of the dissertation are delineated. The research design, overall methodology and the implementation of the research approach adopted are discussed at the end of the chapter.

1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION OF THE RESEARCH

The context of this research is the career behaviour of the young, early career person or the 'emerging adult'. This stage in life is defined as "a new phase of the life course between adolescence and adulthood" (Arnett, 2000; Shanahan & Longest, 2009) during which various roles and identities are explored with, often, minimal commitment and hesitant decision making. For the individual this is also a time of near infinite possibilities with the most significant life choices still to be made. More specifically, this research study focuses on the school-to-work transition phase as well as on the coping resources and psychological career resources required by 'emerging adults' to ensure proactive career behaviour on their part, as they embark on their early career paths and commit to an initial set of career objectives (De Vos, De Clippeleer & Dewilde, 2009; Feldman & Whitcomb, 2004).

Young people entering the world of work for the first time are faced with many challenges. They often have to deal with long periods of unemployment after achieving their tertiary qualifications (Lim, 2010) and, on finding employment, they have to make the transition from student to employee, adjust to a new work environment and navigate the many global career challenges of the 21st century. These challenges include carving out a career in a world characterised by increased economic uncertainty, an increasing awareness of pervasive societal issues and decreased job security, adapting to a constantly changing environment, fast-paced technology and increased personal responsibility for ongoing up skilling, lifelong learning and also ensuring enduring employability throughout the course of a viable and fulfilling career (Arnett, 2000; Baruch, 2003; Marock, 2008; Schabracq & Cooper, 2000; Sullivan, 1999).

Underemployment during the early career years is also a possible source of confusion, increased anxiety, frustration and negativity for graduates as it is likely that their first job will be characterised by some or all of the following, namely, not requiring a tertiary education, being unrelated to the initial field of study, not requiring the specific training and expertise acquired during the diploma/degree, and/or being of a part-time nature (Feldman & Turnley, 1995).

Coupled with underemployment, graduates are also likely to encounter feelings of disappointment and a lack of fulfilment as initial workplace expectations are adjusted and moulded by the actual experience of the organisational environment, which is often less favourable than anticipated (Minten, 2010; Nicholson & Arnold, 1991). In addition, the conflict generated by economic insecurity, tentative decision making and delayed commitment may contribute to a difficult future for these new labour market entrants, while increasing feelings of vulnerability and self-doubt, at the very point in their lives when confidence and self-assurance are needed in order to make proactive career choices (Mills & Blossfeld, 2009).

Graduates are also likely to experience the insidious and stressful consequences of having to realise their potential and become something 'more' than they currently are. Contemporary graduate recruitment is orientated towards the idea of the workplace freeing up inner individual qualities, providing opportunities for personal growth and being the site of self-actualisation. This may create an inherent tension between the actualities of the young person and the theoretical potential of what he/she may evolve into. This tension may then lead to a constant sense of insufficiency and antagonism. This, coupled with the notion that there is always more to accomplish in the creation of a future self, may fuel an inner conflict that will be difficult to resolve and which will, possibly, only ever be mediated by both experience and true self-acceptance (Costea, Amiridis & Crump, 2012).

Increased employment uncertainty, underemployment and the need to make sense of and interpret this new experience of being employed (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994) are likely to play a significant role in the creation of work stress which encompasses "issues of interpersonal and role demands, to workplace policies, job conditions, and role and job ambiguity" (Jacobs & Blustein, 2008, p. 175). Work stress may be further defined as "the inability to cope with the pressure in a job" (Love & Irani, 2007, p. 825) and is also an inevitable component of the contemporary business environment.

The South African career environment specifically is beset with additional adverse factors, namely, a high rate of unemployment, particularly structural unemployment, with a mismatch between worker supply and labour demand (Pauw, Oosthuizen, & Van der Westhuizen,

2008), the negative consequences of affirmative action (Motileng, Wagner & Cassimjee, 2006), the impact of broad employment equity drivers on the distribution of available opportunities, skills shortages as well as financial and emotional stressors (Van Vuuren & Fourie, 2000).

In view of the fact that the phenomenon of graduate unemployment is considered to be a major stressor for young people entering the world of work, it is necessary to distinguish between graduates and diplomates, as the reported unemployment levels differ significantly based on these distinctions. In the relevant literature, the term 'graduate' refers to someone who holds a bachelor's degree or higher from a university, while a person with a tertiary qualification other than a bachelor's degree or higher (e.g. diploma) is known as a diplomate. The trend in South Africa shows that the unemployment rate for graduates is approximately 5% and 16% for diplomates. This highlights the important role of education in gaining access to the labour market. In addition, although business/financial/insurance services employ up 25% of all graduates in South Africa, commerce graduates are the most likely to be unemployed. Age and race also play a role in unemployment, with younger graduates being more likely to be unemployed than older graduates and, despite the narrowing gap, white graduates are more likely to be employed than their black counterparts (Altbeker & Storme, 2013). In this study, the term 'graduate' is used to refer to anyone who has obtained a post-matriculation qualification of at least one year in duration.

The South African organisational environment makes physical, mental and emotional demands on the individual and this is often a stressful experience for the young graduate. The coping resources which the young, early career graduate is able to deploy in order to manage these demands during the early career phase are central to this study.

In the context of the early career, stress is likely to be a result of an imbalance (either actual or perceived) between the nature of the challenge of a contemporary career and the perception of the available resources. Both coping resources and, more specifically, psychological career resources are likely to support and promote career resilience, career adaptability and a generally positive outlook at the start of a career. These capabilities are, therefore, likely to mitigate the effects of the stress and reduce the feeling of being overloaded or overwhelmed by the demands of the work environment (Gordon, 1996; Jackson & Finney, 2002; Le Fevre, Matheny & Kolt, 2003).

An individual's career choice is far more significant than a job choice and is, essentially, the start of an integrated life journey – an active exploration of the possible selves and emerging identities – as the sense of self, vocational orientation and different life roles are meshed

together to form an unified meaning and overall life purpose for the individual (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2007; Eggerth, 2008; Holmes, 2011; Savickas, 2005).

Given that young people have numerous challenges to overcome as they begin their working life and, in the process, pursue enjoyment in their work and general happiness (Arnett, 2000), the question arises as to the coping resources which these young people employ or require to help them to remain confidently in control of their career journeys and, thus, be able to deal with increased stress levels and maintain general well-being at a time of ongoing adjustment and development (Dietrich, Jokisaari & Nurmi, 2012).

In addition to coping resources, it would appear that the concept of psychological career resources may also contribute to understanding the capacity of young adults for engaging in proactive career behaviour as well as supporting career adaptability – the ongoing ability to respond to constant change in a largely unpredictable work environment (Savickas, 1997). This, in turn, is likely to promote overall career success, be it on a subjective, intensely personal level or in terms of the typical external and objective signs of success, including status, remuneration and job title (Gunz & Heslin, 2005).

Psychological career resources may be seen as the internal (psychosocial) career resources or meta competencies which are available to an individual and which include, amongst others, unique career preferences and values, career decision making and commitment, career experimentation, career identity as well as career resilience which helps to prevent burnout in the pursuit of a career (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2012). These resources will be explained more fully in Chapter 2.

In addition, the relationship between coping resources and psychological career resources is likely to play a role in the development of the vocational and career self. In the context of the present study, coping resources represent the adaptive, cognitive-behavioural capacities inherent in individuals and which enable them to handle stressors in the work-career environment more effectively, to experience fewer or less intense symptoms upon exposure to a career-related stressor, or to recover faster after being exposed to such stressors (Coetzee & Esterhuizen, 2010; Hammer & Marting, 1987). On the other hand, psychological career resources represent the individual's self-awareness of his/her career behaviour and identity (career preferences, motives and values), as well as the psychosocial career meta-competencies (career enablers, career drivers and career harmonisers) that he/she may draw on to proactively manage the career development and career management process in a turbulent and uncertain work-career context (Coetzee, 2013). The career self performs an evaluative and corrective role over the vocational self in that, through the creation of

meaning, behaviour is directed as life themes, career values, beliefs and goals emerge and become more defined for the young adult (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2008).

This study focuses on exploring whether the psychological career resources of individuals relate significantly to and predict their coping resources. In other words, the study aims to assess whether the self-perceptions of one's psychosocial career resources (as an aspect of the vocational self) either strengthen or diminish the cognitive-behavioural, adaptive capacities which are represented by the coping resources of individuals. The development of coping and adaptive resources has become essential in managing a career in more turbulent employment contexts (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). In addition, coping resources help individuals cope with the negative physiological effects of social or environmental stressors (Hammer & Marting, 1987) which may affect their career wellbeing (Coetzee, 2013; Johnston, Luciano, Maggiori, Ruch & Rossier, 2013). Understanding the way in which career-related psychosocial resources strengthen the capacity of individuals to cope with and adapt to change and uncertainty in the work-career environment has, therefore, become an important research theme in the career literature (Coetzee, 2013; Johnston et al., 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

While the literature review reveals a significant body of information regarding coping resources and psychological career resources as separate constructs, very little exists on the exact nature of the relationship between the two. In addition, little research exists on the early career experiences of South African graduates and their coping resources and psychological career resources during the school-to-work transition phase in their lives. An enhanced understanding, on the part of both the industrial psychologist and the career guidance practitioner, of the way in which young people cope with the career demands of this stage of their working lives, will provide valuable insights for the field of Career Psychology (as a subfield of Industrial and Organisational Psychology) in terms of developing programmes and providing support to young people in their pursuit of a career in the 21st century. It is envisaged that the outcome of this research will provide a starting point from which to continue to formally build the career meta-competencies of young, early career South African graduates by enhancing those areas which are already well developed, understanding the consequences of the less developed areas for career construction and overall career success whilst simultaneously strengthening the psychological career and coping resources which are less frequently accessed by young people in their management of their transition into the world of work.

In particular, this study relates to a group of graduates attending a structured Work Readiness Programme. This programme, in itself, is likely to increase the individual's sense of empowerment and confidence as regards being able to successfully manage many of the transitional demands of the early career. It is also anticipated that this study will help career guidance practitioners and industrial psychologists to understand the interrelationships between a set of career-related psychological and coping resources and the accumulative efficacy of each in supporting the overall career well-being of the young adult.

Based on the above, the general research question may be formulated as the following:

- What is the nature of the relationship between the psychological career resources and the coping resources of individuals in the school-to-work transition phase of their lives?

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.3.1 Research questions: Literature review

Based on the broad problem statement and the general research question, the following specific research questions arising from the literature review may be posed:

Research question 1: How are coping resources and psychological career resources conceptualised in the relevant literature?

Research question 2: What is the theoretical relationship between coping resources and psychological resources?

Research question 3: What are the biographical variables which impact on coping resources and psychological career resources?

Research question 4: What are the theoretical implications for career counselling and guidance practices?

1.3.2 Research questions: Empirical study

Based on the **empirical study** the following specific research questions may be formulated:

Research question 1: What is the nature of the empirical relationship between coping resources and psychological career resources as found in a sample of young, early career, South African graduates in the school-to-work transition phase of their lives?

Research question 2: Do psychological resources positively and significantly predict the coping resources of individuals?

Research question 3: Do individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources?

Research question 4: What are the practical implications for career counselling and guidance practices?

Research question 5: What recommendations may be formulated for both practice and future research?

1.4 RESEARCH AIMS

Given the research questions stated above, the following general and specific aims may be developed.

1.4.1 General aim

The general aim of this research study is to investigate the relationship between the psychological career resources and coping resources of individuals in the school-to-work transition phase of their lives and to assess whether individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly as regards their psychological career resources and coping resources.

1.4.2 Specific aims

1.4.2.1 Literature review

Based on the literature review, the specific aims of the research study are as follows:

Research aim 1: To investigate the way in which coping resources and psychological career resources are conceptualised in the relevant literature

Research aim 2: To investigate the nature of the relationship between coping resources and psychological career resources

Research aim 3: To identify the biographical variables which impact on coping resources and psychological career resources

Research aim 4: To propose theoretical recommendations for career counselling and guidance practices

1.4.2.2 Empirical study

Based on the empirical investigation, the specific aims of the research are as follows:

Research aim 1: To explore the nature of the statistical relationship between coping resources and psychological career resources as found in a sample of young, early career, South African graduates in the school-to-work transition phase of their lives

Research aim 2: To explore whether psychological resources positively and significantly predict the coping resources of individuals

Research aim 3: To assess whether individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources

Research aim 4: To identify the practical implications for career counselling and guidance practices

Research aim 5: To formulate recommendations for both practice and future research

1.5 PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE

According to Reber and Reber (2001), a paradigm is a collective group of attitudes, beliefs, actions, processes and practices which form a generally acknowledged viewpoint of a discipline at a particular juncture. In essence, the paradigm perspective provides a clear and well-defined framework in which to conduct research by both articulating the applicable theories/laws, methodology and underlying assumptions and making a contribution to the emergence of relevant research problems, while taking into account the overall scientific commitment to expand and extend the existing body of knowledge in a particular field of study. An effective paradigm also influences the successful 'matching' of selected theories with empirically tested facts, with the final outcome being a further refinement of the theoretical models, be it through the 'acceptance' of theorised facts or the inclusion of uncovered anomalies (Mouton & Marais, 1994). The paradigm perspective of this study may be explained in terms of the intellectual climate and the market of intellectual resources.

1.5.1 The intellectual climate

This section considers the paradigmatic and conceptual foundations which are relevant to this study, with a specific focus on the constructs of coping resources and psychological career resources. Three paradigm perspectives are applicable to this research study. The

literature review on coping resources will be presented according to the paradigm of positive psychology, while the literature review on psychological career resources will be presented from a humanistic psychology paradigm. In terms of the empirical research the quantitative methods are presented from the positivist research paradigm.

1.5.1.1 Literature review

The research on psychological career resources is grounded in the humanistic paradigm, which is characterised by an understanding of and respect for the human as something more than merely an object of scientific study. It seeks to uncover the complexities of individual meaning making, personal experiences and perspectives in order to fully embrace what it means to be human and to tap into infinite human potential through holistic learning, growth, autonomy, freedom, control and passion (Fischer, 2003; Frick, 1987).

The construct of psychological career resources assumes that an individual is able to exercise control over career behaviour and also that the individual will strive to enhance inherent potential through the process of developing a career. In the context of this study, the construct of psychological career resources is conceptually defined as the collection of career-related competencies (knowledge, skills, attributes), career orientation and values that support committed and meaningful career activities, overall employability and career success in the 21st century (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008; Coetzee, 2013; Hall & Chandler, 2005). This definition will be expanded in Chapter 2.

The study on coping resources is centred within a positive psychology paradigm. Positive psychology is characterised by a focus on healthy individuals and seeks to understand the positive personal traits that are likely to make an individual optimistic, kind, caring and content, and live a life of purpose, meaning and engagement. Thus, positive psychology seeks to understand true happiness and well-being (which is more than merely the absence of unhappiness). It also looks to explore all that is right with people and, in the process, to nurture strengths, promote excellence and help to build lives which are worth living (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Hansen, Edlund & Branholm, 2005; Lent & Brown, 2008; Seligman, Parks & Steen, 2004)

In the context of this study and in light of positive psychology's focus on optimal functioning and the realisation of full human potential (Elliot, 2002; Pajares, 2001), the construct of coping resources may be conceptually defined as the resources which are inherent in an individual and which promote the effective handling of stressors, either by lessening the intensity of the symptoms which are the result of these stressors or by promoting a faster

recovery from the stressor (Hammer & Marting, 1987). This construct will be fully explained in Chapter 2.

1.5.1.2 Empirical study

The empirical study consists of a quantitative study which was conducted within the domain of the positivist research paradigm. The positivist research paradigm seeks to understand phenomena through the operationalisation of concepts, observation and measurement (Firestone, 1987; Johnson, 2001; Snyman, 1993). A quantitative study is clearly defined and focuses on an investigation into the existence and nature of the relationship between the two constructs of coping resources and psychological career resources. In so doing, the study provides unambiguous and objective quantitative measures of the two concepts. These measures are derived from scientifically orientated procedures, statistically acceptable measurement instruments and statistically appropriate analysis (Mouton & Marais, 1994).

1.5.2 The market of intellectual resources

The market of intellectual resources denotes the cluster of meta-theoretical beliefs which have a direct influence on the status of the knowledge claims relating to the reality (epistemic claims) under investigation. There are two major types of meta-theoretical beliefs to be considered. Firstly, there are the theoretical beliefs about the nature and structure of the constructs, coping resources and psychological career resources which seek to describe and interpret these aspects of human behaviour. Secondly, there are the methodological beliefs that are concerned with the nature and structure of the research process, including preferences, models and assumptions (Mouton & Marais, 1994).

1.5.2.1 Meta-theoretical statements

Meta-theoretical statements are the guidelines and assumptions underlying specific theories and methodological strategies that are not directly tested in the study being conducted but which are, nevertheless, applicable to the theories, models and paradigms contextualised in the research (Mouton & Marais, 1994). In terms of relevant disciplines, this study focuses on the field of industrial and organisational psychology and, specifically, on the sub-fields of career psychology and psychometrics.

The field of industrial and organisational psychology is considered to be an applied field of psychology which focuses on human functioning and behaviour in the work setting. It is, thus, concerned with both a broader understanding of the psychological meaning of work and the application of theories and principles on an individual, group and organisational level in order to enhance performance and overall well-being (Rothmann & Cilliers, 2007). By implication the field is interested in the concepts of both employment and unemployment and, in

particular, in the psychological effects of the latter on individuals in terms of their attitudes and ability to cope with the demands of unemployment in, for example, the multicultural South African context.

This study investigates the relationship between the coping resources (the inherent cognitive-behavioural, adaptive capacities which support individuals in their dealing with stressors) and the psychological career resources (the psychosocial career meta-competencies underpinning adaptive career behaviour and sustained engagement in career development) of individuals in the school-to-work transition phase (unemployed young graduates). Thus, it seeks to further understand the psychological processes which are involved when an individual either enters or attempts to gain access to the world of work.

Career Psychology is the study of human behaviour in relation to lifelong employment activities and experiences. Thus, it encompasses the vocational aspects of selecting a career, career development, planning, guidance and counselling in order to facilitate the optimisation of talent and potential as well as the fit between an individual and the organisation (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2008). It is hoped that this study will help to further an understanding of the types of support which young graduates require as they embark on their careers.

It is also important to note that Nicholas, Naidoo and Pretorius (2006) assert that Career Psychology in South Africa has a social responsibility to transform South African society by, amongst other things, addressing the career needs of marginalised groups, including the unemployed. It is envisaged that the outcomes of this study will assist career counsellors in providing focused support for black, unemployed graduates and also provide organisations with insights into the specific psychosocial requirements of new entrants into the workplace.

Psychometrics is the collective branch of psychology which is concerned with the measurement of aspects of psychological functioning, including personality, aptitude and intelligence (Reber & Reber, 2001). This study used the following psychometric instruments, namely, the Coping Resources Inventory (CRI) and the Psychological Career Resources Inventory (PCRI), to measure the two variables of coping resources and psychological career resources relevant to the study.

Hammer and Marting's (1978) classical theoretical framework for coping resources and Coetzee's (2008a; 2013) framework for psychological career resources are applicable to this study. In the former model, coping resources are conceptualised as the inherent psychological capacities which an individual may access in order to handle stressors

effectively, either by reducing the number and intensity of the symptoms arising from such stressors or enabling a faster recovery after exposure to the stressor.

The Psychological Career Resources Model explains the inner psychological career resources which an individual may utilise in order to support proactive career behaviour and promote adaptability throughout the duration of a lifelong career (Coetzee, 2008a).

1.5.2.2 Methodological paradigm

The methodological paradigm forms part of the overall research paradigm in which commitment to a particular theory and set of overall assumptions is made about the research topic in question. Thus, the methodological component of a study involves selecting a given set of techniques and/or instruments in order to optimally test/measure the central hypotheses of the study (Mouton & Marais, 1994).

This study is grounded in the positivist approach to research, as this approach meets the following criteria (Snyman, 1993):

- The concepts of coping resources and psychological career resources are defined and operationalised in the relevant qualitative literature review
- The research dimensions are defined in the selected instruments
- Observable indicators are measured in the quantitative empirical study through the use of the selected instruments (i.e. measures of behaviour based on the written responses in the instruments)
- The data is collated and analysed in order either to accept or reject the central hypotheses of the study

1.5.3 Central research hypothesis and specific research hypotheses

The **central hypothesis** of this investigation is defined as follows:

There is a relationship between the coping resources and psychological career resources of young, early career South African graduates, and gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources.

The specific research hypotheses are as follows:

Table 1.1

Research hypotheses

Research aim	Research hypothesis
Research aim 1: To explore the nature of the statistical relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources as found in a sample of young, early career, South African graduates in the school-to-work transition phase of their lives	**Research hypothesis 1**: The psychological career resources of individuals significantly and positively relate to their coping resources
Research aim 2: To explore whether psychological career resources positively and significantly predict the coping resources of individuals	**Research hypothesis 2:** The psychological career resources of individuals positively and significantly predict their coping resources
Research aim 3: To assess whether individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources	**Research hypothesis 3:** Individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is the planned and structured approach to collecting and analysing data in order to align the research aims of a study with the practical concerns and constraints of the study, and to optimise the utility and validity of the overall research findings (Mouton & Marais, 1994).

1.6.1 Types of research

Depending on the aim of the study, three types of research can be identified, namely, exploratory, descriptive and explanatory research. Each type is briefly explained below.

1.6.1.1 Exploratory research

This type of research is conducted when the area of study is largely unknown and the aim is to obtain new information and understanding about the topic. The research approach is flexible and must be open to different ideas and insights, with this often leading to the development of fresh hypotheses and the setting of innovative research directions (Mouton & Marais, 1994). This study is exploratory in nature as it compares various theoretical perspectives on the psychological career resources and coping resources of young, early career graduates in the school-to-work transition phase of their lives.

1.6.1.2 Descriptive research

Descriptive research aims to describe phenomena (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). In descriptive research the variables of interest are conceptually and operationally defined. These variables may be categorised as views, beliefs, attitudes or facts and they are then explained in order to provide a holistic illustration of the phenomenon as it exists (Brink, 2006). In this empirical study, descriptive research applies to the means, standard deviations and Cronbach's alphas (internal consistency reliability coefficients) of the constructs of psychological career resources and coping resources.

1.6.1.3 Explanatory research

Explanatory research seeks to uncover causality between variables over and above the demonstration of the existence of a relationship between such variables (Mouton & Marais, 1994). As a result of the cross-sectional nature of this research study, the focus will not be on establishing cause and effect, but rather on establishing the nature, direction and magnitude of the relationship between the variables. The empirical study aims to explore the extent to which the variance in the dependent variable (coping resources) may be explained by the independent variable (psychological career resources).

1.6.2 Validity

There are a number of different types of validity which are applicable to this study. Theoretical validity refers to the clear formulation of a coherent, conceptual analysis of the key dimensions of the study with the analysis being presented in a logical and mutually exclusive way. Sound theoretical validity forms a solid base for the research process (Mouton & Marais, 1994). The literature review in this study meets these requirements for theoretical validity.

Measurement validity relates to both criterion validity and construct validity. The former comprises concurrent validity – the simultaneous taking of measurements which yield correlated results – and predictive validity – the use of a specific criterion/measurement to predict behaviour/performance in the future. On the other hand, construct validity refers to the extent to which the items of an instrument actually measure the construct under investigation. In this study, both the research instruments comply with test validity requirements (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

Research should be both internally and externally valid. Internal validity refers to the study generating accurate and valid findings about a specific phenomenon (Riggio, 2009). Thus, internal validity refers to the extent to which the research results can be ascribed to the controlled, independent variable as opposed to uncontrolled, unrelated factors (Brink, 2006).

For research to be internally valid the constructs must be measured in a valid manner and the data measured must be accurate and reliable. In addition, the data analysis should be relevant to the type of data collected and the final solutions must be adequately supported by the data. Internal validity also refers to whether variations in the dependent variables may be attributed to the independent variable and not to extraneous or confounding variables related to, for example, maturation, history, testing or instrumentation (Riggio, 2009).

Internal validity was assured in this study by the researcher minimising selection bias (targeting the population of young South African graduates attending the FASSET Work Readiness Programme), while as large a sample as possible was chosen to offset the effects of extraneous variables. The questionnaires also included standard instructions and information to all the participants. The statistical procedures adopted controlled for biographical variables (gender and employment status). The research instruments were tested for both construct validity and reliability. Extraneous factors may be unrelated to the research but may affect the dependent variables (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

External validity refers to the degree to which it is possible to generalise the data gathered and the context of the research study to larger populations and the environments (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). External validity is also associated with the sampling procedures used, the time and place of the research, and the conditions under which the research is conducted (Riggio, 2009). In this study, external validity was assured by the fact that the results were relevant only to the population of young South African graduates attending the FASSET Work Readiness Programme. Targeting the total population of employees would help to increase the generalisability of the results to the target population. The study was cross-sectional in nature and purposive sampling was used. Standard instructions were given to all the participants.

1.6.3 Reliability

Reliability refers to the degree to which a study would produce the same results given a different set of circumstances and a different sample. In other words, reliability relates to the standardisation of the research process and involves the researcher, the participants, the measuring instrument and the research context (Mouton & Marais, 1994). The measuring instruments used in this study were established instruments which meet the requirements for reliability. Throughout the various testing sessions aimed at the collection of data for the purposes of the study, great care was taken to ensure that the process was standardised for all the groups.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient measure was used to estimate the internal consistency reliability of each instrument based on the number of the items in the test and the average inter-correlation between the test items (Murphy & Davidshofer, 2005). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranges from 0, which indicates that there is no internal consistency, to 1, which is the maximum internal consistency score (Terre Blanche et al., 2006); thus, the higher the alpha, the more reliable the item or test. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .70 to .75 is considered a desirable reliability coefficient (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

1.6.4 Unit of analysis

In view of the fact that the social sciences are concerned with the study of human behaviour, the unit of analysis may either be a group or single units (Mellenbergh et al., 2003). The unit of analysis is derived from the purpose of the study, including what is to be studied. For the purposes of this research study, the unit of analysis was the individual graduate. The results from the individuals were used to develop an understanding of the representative sample in order to provide an insight into the psychological career resources and coping resources of the South African graduate population (Mouton & Marais, 1994). In terms of the data analyses, the unit of analysis was the group. However, when investigating the differences between the biographical groups (gender and employment status) the unit of analysis was these sub-groups.

1.6.5 Research variables

Variables refer to the characteristics of the research subject which are being investigated and are used to determine the causality of the relationship between the defined constructs. There are two main types of variables, namely, the dependent variable which is acted upon and the independent variable which influences/acts on the former (Christensen, 1994; Mouton & Marais, 1994).

In this study, the independent variable was the psychological career resources of the graduates, while the dependent variable was their coping resources. Firstly, the study identified a relationship between these variables and then sought to understand the direction and strength of this relationship. Cohen's (1992) effect sizes were calculated in order to establish the practical significance of the magnitude of the correlation values. According to Cohen's (1992) guidelines, correlation values of $r \leq .29$ are practically significant (small effect), correlation values of $r \geq .30 \leq .49$ are practically significant (medium effect) while correlation values of $r \geq .50$ are practically significant (large effect). Regression values of $R^2 \leq 0.12$ (small practical effect size), $R^2 \geq 0.13 \leq 0.25$ (moderate practical effect size) and $R^2 \geq 0.26$ (large practical effect size) were considered for this study.

1.6.6 Methods to ensure ethical research principles

The research study was conducted in accordance with the guiding principles set out in the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles in the Conduct of Research with Human Participants (Christensen, 1994). These principles, which were developed in order to protect the welfare and dignity of participants, include the following:

- The study was reviewed to ensure that it was ethically acceptable and did not violate any human rights
- The benefits of the study were weighed against any risks to the participants
- The investigator, at all times, ensured the ethical treatment of all participants
- The purpose of the research, including a clear explanation of the rights and responsibilities of both parties, was discussed with the participants
- There was no concealment or deception as regards the purpose of the study. The aims of the research were transparent and participants were free to ask questions during the scheduled times
- Participants were informed that they were free to decline to participate or to withdraw from the process at any time should they have felt uncomfortable. This was an important consideration for this study as the participants were on a Work Readiness Programme and the researcher was a facilitator on the programme and, therefore, in a position of authority (written consent was obtained from each participant)
- The researcher protected the participants from both physical and mental discomfort. Despite the fact that this study was not likely to create either physical or mental discomfort it was, nevertheless, essential that the participants were encouraged to discuss any concerns with the researcher who then assessed the need for any action to be taken, as well as discussed the matter with the researcher's supervisor as and when this was deemed necessary
- After the data collection, participants were given feedback on the results of the process. The results were kept confidential and were not related back to any one individual. In collating the data, individuals were accorded a numerical reference which was used to capture the schedule of results. This helped to ensure the anonymity of the data
- Although not anticipated, the participants were monitored for any undesirable consequences after the research had been completed. In view of the fact that the researcher had frequent contact with the participants this was monitored in an informal and ad hoc manner

1.7 RESEARCH METHOD

The research was conducted in three phases, with each of these phases consisting of several steps. Figure 1.1 below provides an overview of the different phases.

Phase 1: Literature review

- Step 1: Coping Resources

Conceptualisation of coping and coping resources and the variables that influence the development and expression of these, including the implications of the manifestation of coping resources for career counselling and guidance practices. Hammer and Marting's (1987) Five Domain Theory of Coping Resources was the theoretical framework used for this study.

- Step 2: Psychological Career Resources

Conceptualisation of the career meta-competencies essential for career adaptability and overall career success, including the variables that influence the development and expression of psychological career resources and the implications for career counselling and guidance practices. The Psychological Career Resources Framework, as developed by Coetzee (2008a; 2013), was the theoretical model used in the study.

- Step 3: Theoretical integration

Coping resources and psychological career resources were integrated in order to understand the theoretical links between the two constructs.

Phase 2: Empirical study

The empirical study relates to the nature of the sample (including the context and biographical data), the measuring instruments, data collection methods, data processing and analysis of results. The empirical study is presented in the format of a research article in Chapter 3.

The research article contained an outline of the fundamental components of the research, relevant background to the study, highlighted trends from the literature, discussed the potential contribution of the investigation, explained both the research approach and research method in the context of the research design, stated the results of the empirical study, discussed the research results as well as the conclusions and limitations of the study

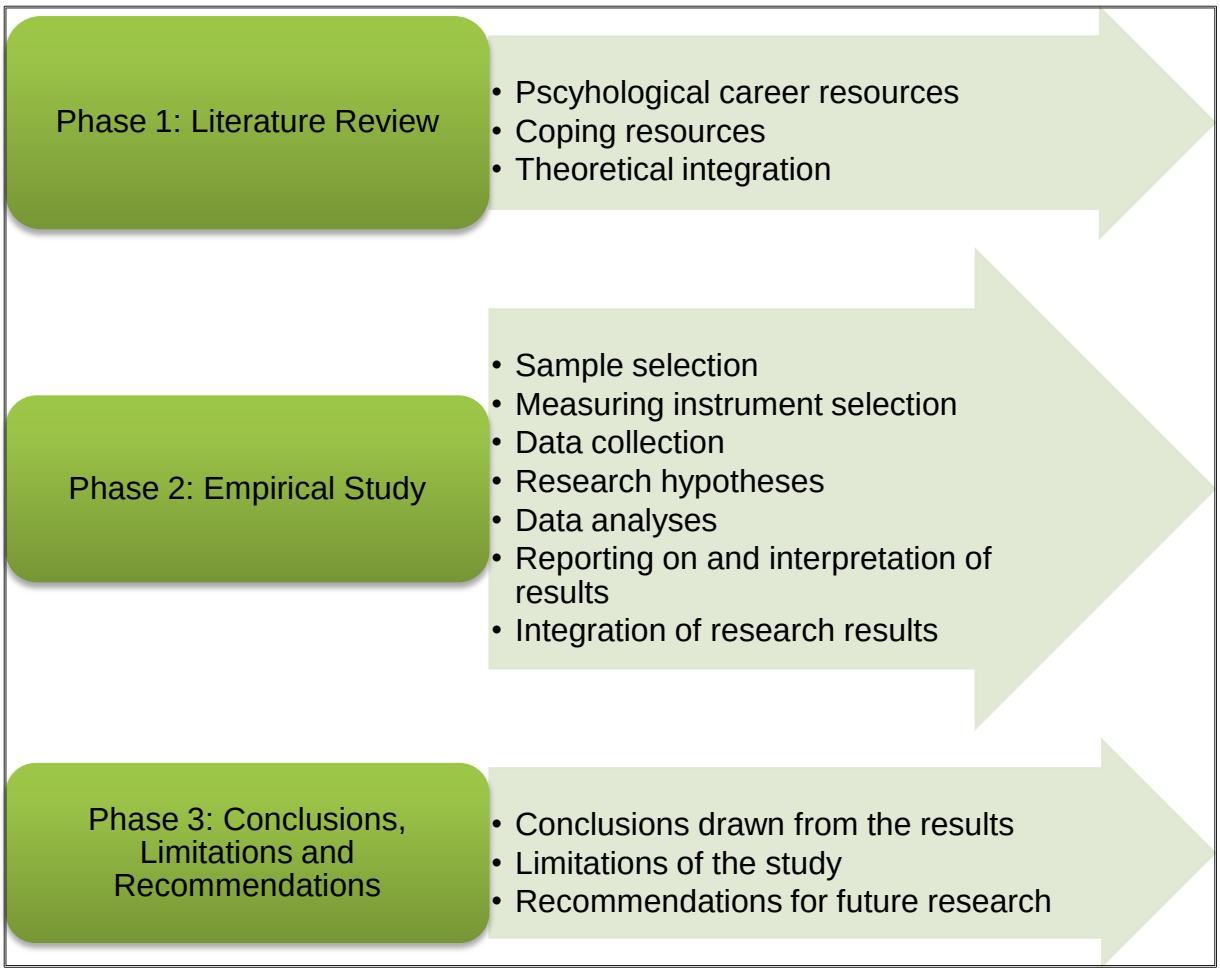

Figure 1.1: Phases of the empirical study

and suggested recommendations for practice and future research. Figure 1.1 above depicts the steps that were followed in the empirical study to ensure that the data was collected, evaluated and reported upon in a rigorous and scientific manner.

Phase 3: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

Conclusions about the results of the study, including a rejection or acceptance of the central hypotheses were discussed, the limitations of the results explained and recommendations for future research suggested.

Chapter 4 integrates the research study and discusses the conclusions, limitations and recommendations in more detail.

1.8 CHAPTER LAYOUT

The chapters of this dissertation will be presented in the following format:

Chapter 1 provides the background to and motivation for the study from a theoretical perspective and introduces the problem statement, research questions and paradigm as well as the research methods relevant to the study.

Chapter 2 draws on important focus areas from the literature review and explains the constructs of psychological career resources and coping resources. At the end of the chapter, the two constructs are integrated on both a theoretical and a practical level.

Chapter 3 comprises a scientific research article in which the results of the research findings are presented.

Chapter 4 concludes the study, discusses the specific limitations of the study and makes recommendations for future research into the early careers of South African graduates.

1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the background to the study. The chapter also sought to define the specific research objectives and aims of the study, as well as the paradigm perspective and research design used in the study. The chapter layout of the dissertation was also explained.

Chapter 2 addresses the literature research aims and presents the literature review in which the two constructs, namely, psychological career resources and coping resources, are discussed separately and then theoretically integrated in a tabular format.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ON COPING RESOURCES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CAREER RESOURCES

Stress may be particularly acute at the time of transition from education to work and at the point of entry into an organisation when significant career decisions and career compromises may need to be made (Dietrich et al., 2012). The act of relinquishing a long-anticipated career goal or adjusting early career plans as a result of institutional, familial or societal barriers, whilst inherent in the transition from graduate to young employee, remains a stressful event which must be successfully navigated within the broader career development framework (Creed & Hughes, 2013; Morrison, 2012). In the context of this study it is assumed that coping resources (as a set of cognitive-behavioural, adaptive capacities) provide the platform for the individual to better manage and deal with the stresses in his/her life and, in the career setting, the stressors in the work-career environment. Psychological career resources are, thus, the specific inherent career-related psychosocial resources or career meta-competencies which enable adaptation to changing career circumstances and foster the ability to select and shape environments effectively so as to enable success within a particular socio-cultural context (Coetzee, 2008a). It is further assumed that well-developed psychological career resources will enhance the use of cognitive-behavioural, adaptive capacities such as those represented by the coping resources of individuals.

In this chapter, the two main constructs of coping resources (dependent variable) and psychological career resources (independent variable) are explained separately in terms of the relevant literature. The two constructs are then integrated in a tabular format and in the presentation of models and approaches. The practical implications for career counselling and guidance practices are reviewed in the final sections of the chapter.

2.1 COPING RESOURCES

In the following section, coping resources will be explained and distinguished from a coping strategy. In addition, the broad term coping and the various forms of coping will be briefly discussed.

2.1.1 Conceptualisation

Coping resources are defined as those cognitive-behavioural resources or adaptive capacities which are inherent in individuals and which enable them to handle stressors more effectively, to experience fewer or less intense symptoms during stress and/or to recover more rapidly from exposure to a stressor (Hammer & Marting, 1987).

Before examining coping resources in particular it is essential that the concept of coping be understood. Coping occurs when an individual perceives a situation as stressful and directs attention and effort towards the potential threat in order to manage and reduce the harmful effects of the potential challenge, regardless of the efficacy of the effort. Coping is, thus, an ongoing, multifaceted transactional process between the individual, the environment and the stressor (Zeidner & Hammer, 1992).

Coyne, Aldwin and Lazarus (1981, cited in Latack & Havlovic, 1992, p. 480) define coping as a range of cognitive and behavioural approaches which are used to manage both environmental and internal demands, when an individual's resources are either stretched or exceeded, in an effort to reduce the internal conflict and subsequent stress. Coping and the way in which stress is experienced contributes to the subjective perception of well-being and the general quality of life. Coping is described and measured in a cross-cultural context by (a) physical health, (b) psychological well-being (including self-esteem, spirituality and cognition), (c) social relationships, and (d) the environment (Belizaire & Fuertes, 2011; Heiman, 2004).

The work of Folkman and Lazarus (1980, cited in Pienaar & Rothmann, 2003, p. 81) makes a distinction between problem-focused (task situation and problem-solving) coping and emotion-focused (emotional or anxiety reactions) coping. The former is known as *Class I Coping* and aims to deal with an issue directly through adjusting the interaction between the person and his/her environment and/or eliminating the cause of the stressful situation. This form of coping is typically most effective for circumstances in which the individual is able to exert control over the stressful situation but it is less useful in highly ambiguous contexts (Cheng, 2003; Feldman & Turnley, 1995). Research suggests that high levels of self-esteem in an individual are likely to support the use of problem focused coping (Kinicki, Prussia & McKee-Ryan, 2000).

The latter *Class II Coping (emotion-focused coping)* refers to attempts to regulate the emotional effects of the event/issue by alleviating the consequences of the stress (Feldman & Turnley, 1995; Latack & Havlovic, 1992) and is characteristically most appropriate for stressful settings over which the individual has very little control (Cheng, 2003). Although the two classes of coping are conceptually different, they are essentially interdependent and the balance/interplay between them is likely to contribute jointly to the overall efficacy of the coping process (Lazarus, 2000).

This balance or coping flexibility is achieved through the cognitive process of discriminative facility, which involves actively evaluating the stressful situation and selecting the most

appropriate strategy with which to address it. The selection of an appropriate strategy (coping flexibility) is usually mediated by the motivational influence of the 'need for closure'. People with a strong 'need for closure' are more likely to feel uncomfortable in uncertain stressful situations and this, in turn, is likely to steer coping methods towards those which will lead to a suitable and swift conclusion, rather than time being spent on information processing and generating a number of possible solutions to address the stressful event (Cheng, 2003).

Coping may also be understood in terms of cognitive coping, which involves drawing on mental strategies, planning and organising as well as using self-talk to maintain perspective and to see the positive side of a seemingly challenging situation. Behavioural coping refers to those observable actions in relation to the stress, for example, taking a run to alleviate physical tension, or discussing the problem with a colleague (Latack & Havlovic, 1992). Hamarat, Thompson, Steele, Matheny and Simons (2002) assert that the use of this form of coping is used increasingly by the elderly (over 75) and that cognitive adjustment is a key contributing factor to this group's life satisfaction. Although this age group is not the focus of this study, it is worth noting that the writers indicate that coping is not a static process and that it matures and changes over time.

Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) further extrapolate the role of positive emotion in adaptive coping with stress. It is likely that positive emotion helps to sustain the coping efforts, provides respite during stressful situations and helps in the restoration of exhausted resources. More specifically, Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) have identified three classes of coping mechanisms, namely, positive reappraisal, problem focused coping already discussed and the creation of positive events.

The cognitive positive reappraisal process involves focusing on the good in what is happening or has happened, through the identification of personal growth opportunities, actually experiencing personal growth or identifying opportunities to use own experiences to help other people (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000).

Problem-focused coping is often considered to be maladaptive in cases in which there is little personal control over a situation. However, it has been found to be effective in such conditions as it provides an opportunity to exert a modicum of control and this, in turn, may lead to positive feedback and a resultant increase in positive mood. The latter is distinct from experiencing a decrease in distress (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000).

Lastly, the creation of positive events ('psychological time outs') seeks to find positive meaning and humour in everyday and seemingly mundane happenings, which provides

respite from a stressful situation. It is likely that the efficacy of all three of these mechanisms depends on the frequency of usage as opposed to the intensity or duration of being utilised (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000).

Alberts, Schneider and Martijn (2012) explore the concept of non-goal-orientated acceptance coping in their research. The premise for this approach is that the individual under stress does not attempt to exert control over, avoid or alter the stressful state. However, the individual remains present with the emotion and the accompanying non-judgemental acceptance of the emotion which is fully experienced rather than reacted to. This approach focuses on changing the individual's *relationship* with the uncomfortable internal state rather than trying to alter it. This process is likely to utilise less resources than other forms of coping and also minimise the feelings of frustration which are often associated with approaches which are focused on control and avoidance.

For the purposes of this research study, it was important to distinguish a coping resource from a coping strategy. Coping resources are ongoing and operate in the background of an individual's life, focusing attention on certain areas of his/her life (e.g. drawing on his/her social support network) and predisposing the individual to certain kinds of behaviour when under stress (Zeidner & Hammer, 1990).

Coping strategies, on the other hand, refer to the actions/steps people take (what they *do*) when exposed to a specific stressor in a specific context (Lin & Ensel, 1989). The selection of a coping strategy will be dependent primarily on the range of resources available coupled with the situational demands of the stressful event. Resources influence the way in which an individual will define the stressor and assess his/her ability to cope and the degree to which a coping strategy is likely to succeed. Coping strategies may be both cognitive and behavioural and function either to control the situation (i.e. address it) or escape (i.e. avoid the problem) (Ito & Brotheridge, 2003). Overall, active coping, where the situation is managed or addressed at a cognitive level, is thought to be more effective in mitigating the negative effects of stress as compared to the typical avoidance strategies of repressing or ignoring the stressful event (Crockett et al., 2007). After considerable time, energy and fruitful use a coping strategy may become a coping resource (Zeidner & Hammer, 1990).

Coping resources may be either external, that is, present in the societal/social context, or internal to the individual (psychological resources). Psychosocial resources may be defined as those components of both the internal and external environments which are capable of either directly deterring distress (and/or enhancing well-being) or mediating and

counteracting the potentially harmful consequences of a stressful event or situation (Ensel & Lin, 1991; Mak & Mueller, 2000).

An understanding of coping resources may help to explain individual differences in vulnerability to stressors, as these operate as either deterrents or coping enhancers (Lin & Ensel, 1989). According to Ito and Brotheridge (2003), enhancing coping strategies (e.g. problem solving skills) are unlikely to succeed in the absence of a solid coping resource base in the individual. This has important implications for organisations involved in managing the careers of young people just entering the world of work.

Coping resources underpin the young person's ability to meet many of the 21st-century career challenges they face during this transitional period of their lives. Contemporary careers may typically be described as being sensitive and responsive to global uncertainties, lacking in job security, driven by a committed individual who is able to make career compromises, rebound from setbacks and continue to trade with his/her competencies in order to secure more short-term contracts and more frequent career transitions (Savickas, 2011; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Professional and personal development is a key responsibility of the contemporary employee and is fundamental to career and psychological success (Arthur, 2008; Creed & Hughes, 2013; Hall, 2004; Sullivan, 1999). It is likely that individuals will draw on their psychological career resources which may, in turn, be seen as either enablers or barriers to career success and coping, depending on the way in which they are applied.

There is little likelihood that stress will occur in a racially and culturally neutral milieu. It is highly likely that these two dimensions would influence the nature of the stressor, the range of coping resources on which the individual has to draw as well as the emotional response the situation will evoke (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2003).

Key stressors for the individual during the transition from graduate to early career employee include finding employment within a context of reduced opportunities and increased unemployment and with little experience to offer the employer (Pauw et al., 2008), adapting and integrating academic/theoretical learning to the real-world environment, performing to expected standards and learning to work effectively in teams (Candy & Crebert, 1991). In addition, the challenges of being proactive and staying relevant and employable, even at the start of a career, are likely to be omnipresent stressors for the young person, as is the necessity for appropriate career choices, often in the absence of sufficient information or exposure to the workplace (De Vos et al., 2009; Yang & Gysbers, 2007).

Once employed, a significant stressor for young people is the fear of being shown not to be competent in the workplace or of failure and, to this end, they may avoid taking on more challenging roles and risks. This, in turn, is likely to inhibit the exploration of their capacity and ability to acquire new skills and this, will impact negatively on their career adaptability, thus creating a new source of stress for the individuals concerned (Van Vianen, De Pater & Preenen, 2009).

However, the research indicates that despite these transitional challenges, the stress experienced in this period may be partly mitigated by the presence of psychological career resources which would probably assist in the development of individual career agency (the ability to exert control over one's environment proactively), career choices and decisions, as well as the development and maintenance of high levels of engagement with both the organisation and the self as the new career emerges and this fundamental life journey takes off (Baruch, 2003; Coetzee, 2008b; Ferreira, Basson & Coetzee, 2010).

2.1.2 Theory: coping resources

The five domain framework developed by Hammer and Marting (1987, p. 3) is the primary model used in this study for the coping resources construct. The five domains are described briefly below:

- ***Cognitive coping.*** The extent to which individuals maintain a positive sense of self worth, a positive outlook toward others, and optimism about life in general
- ***Social coping.*** The degree to which individuals are embedded in social networks which are able to provide support in times of stress
- ***Emotional coping.*** The degree to which individuals are able to accept and express a range of affect, based on the premise that a range of emotional responses may reduce the long term negative consequences of stress
- ***Spiritual/Philosophical coping.*** The degree to which the actions of individuals are guided by stable and consistent values derived from religious, familial or cultural traditions or from personal philosophy. Such values may serve to define the meaning of potentially stressful events and also to prescribe strategies for responding effectively. This is broader than the traditional western religious definitions of spirituality
- ***Physical coping.*** The degree to which individuals enact the health-promoting behaviours which are believed to contribute to increased physical well-being. Physical well-being is thought to decrease the level of negative response to stress and to enable faster recovery. It may also help to reduce the effect of the potentially

chronic stress-illness cycles resulting from the negative physical responses to stressors that have become major stressors

According to Hammer and Marting (1987), coping resources are those resources which are available to an individual to help handle the stress which is inherent in living. Resources differ from coping strategies in that the latter are situational based and provide relief in the stressful moment, whereas resources are more long lasting, have greater potency and may be drawn upon at any time. In addition, coping resources "are regarded as an inherent predisposition towards certain characteristic behaviours, attitudes and beliefs that serve as a set of important resources that mediate the effects of stressful situations … considered to be a socio-psychological measure that can reduce the likelihood of stress induced disease and burnout" (Coetzee, Jansen & Muller, 2009, p. 173).

Entering the world of work for the first time is often an extremely stressful experience for young people and it is, thus, important that organisations have an understanding of the way in which graduates interpret and manage their stress so as to enable the organisations concerned to provide effective support. Coping resources have a dual function for the individual. On the one hand they help the individual to ward off a stressful situation and, on the other, they help the individual to manage and mediate the stressful event when it arises. Psychosocial coping resources are important in that they reduce distress, facilitate an inner equilibrium and enable the young person to maintain his/her self-identity and self-esteem (Coetzee, 2013). It has been found that the self-concept has an important influence on career decisions, other behaviours, workplace experiences and overall socialisation, all of which will have an immense impact on how effectively the graduate is integrated into the new work environment (Arnold & Nicholson, 1991).

Well-developed and easily accessible coping resources are likely to enable the individual to manage stressful situations effectively and to make appropriate choices in the process. Career choices are part of this process and are especially important during the early career stage as career foundations are being laid.

2.1.3 Variables influencing coping resources

This section reviews the variables that are likely to influence the development and expression of coping resources. For the purposes of this study, culture and gender will be discussed below.

2.1.3.1 Culture

It is essential that social support and, more specifically, the role that relationships play throughout the career development process be understood in terms of the role of culture, age, socioeconomic background and the family structure (Schultheiss, Kress, Manzi & Jeffrey Glasscock, 2001). In this study, the impact of culture will be discussed.

Culture may be defined as a set of "shared motives, values, beliefs, identities and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations" (Noordin, Williams & Zimmer, 2002, p.37). In addition, culture provides a broad framework and cohesion that, in turn, enables individual members of the culture to function. It is highly likely that, in the South African context, culture will exert a significant influence on the relationship between coping resources and psychological resources and also on the way in which coping resources and psychological resources interact in shaping the career choices and overall career adaptation of the graduate. The effect of culture results in a differing emphasis on the individual – the self being distinct from the group (typically Eurocentric) versus the group, where the self is identified with an in-group (typical of collectivist cultures) which is seen as the most important decision making driver and the primary source of encouragement, influence and support for the young graduate (Brown, 2000; Chudzikowski et al., 2009; Noordin et al., 2002).

The unique demands of the work environment and the degree to which these are either aligned to or clash with the graduate's inner sense of self are likely to lead to acculturative stress – the distress caused by adjusting to a new culture. Acculturative stress is defined as "the distinctive types of stress associated with individuals' cross-cultural encounters, which can manifest in physical, social and psychological problems" (Yeh & Inose, 2003, p. 15). The extent of this distress will be influenced by the nature of the individual's cultural milieu, the organisational culture of the new workplace, unique demographic characteristics (including age, gender, and possibly the number of years spent looking for employment) as well as the coping resources available to mitigate this type of stress (Buddington, 2002; Kosic, 2004; Minten, 2010). In addition, the extent to which the cultural background allows for or inhibits flexibility in response to various role demands during this transition phase will impact significantly on the integration of the self-concept which is viewed as key to the development of a sense of coherence (see discussion in section 3.1.3.2) (Constantino, Wilson, Horowitz & Pinel, 2006; Heiman, 2004).

According to Belizaire and Fuertes (2011), culture is likely to impact on coping in the following ways, (a) the type of stress experienced, (b) the way in which the stress is appraised, (c) the choice of coping strategy and (d) the specific coping mechanisms which are, in turn, influenced by the overall appraisal process and the coping resources available.

In addition, young people from an essentially collectivist culture, in which close relationships and social connections are highly valued and relied upon to ease the effects of stress, may experience some difficulty in interacting in individualistic environments in which independence, assertiveness and belief in oneself are sought after and rewarded, as is often typical in the contemporary workplace (Noordin et al., 2002; Yeh & Inose, 2003) and even in South Africa (Rothmann, Jackson & Kruger, 2003).

Typical responses to increased acculturative stress may include elevated levels of emotional pain, feelings of helplessness, inferiority and loneliness as well as perceptions of marginalisation, alienation and discrimination. However, social support and connectedness may help the young person to deal with these negative effects better through increased self-esteem and a sense of belonging, coupled with shared experiences (McArdle, Waters, Briscoe & Hall, 2007; Yeh & Inose, 2003). The role of culture was not empirically tested in this study.

Yeh and Inose (2003) and Belizaire and Fuertes (2011) suggest that the degree of English language fluency may influence the extent of psychological adjustment in young international students and this, in turn, will increase the levels of acculturative stress. This may well be an important factor in the career adjustment of young graduates in the South African workplace. However, English language-speaking skills were not measured in this study.

2.1.3.2 Gender

The literature suggests that males are more likely to engage in avoidance/withdrawal coping behaviours, preferring to manage stress with logic, problem solving, control, objectivity, information and a lack of emotion. On the other hand, females tend to cope with stress by seeking out social support (social) and talking about the stressor (emotional) (Love & Irani, 2007; Nicholls, Polman, Levy, Taylor & Cobley, 2007; Zeidner & Hammer, 1990). Men are also more likely than women to use exercise as a means of coping with and possibly attempting to control a stressful situation (Christie & Shultz, 1998).

Hammer and Marting (1987) used their own instrument, the Coping Resources Inventory, to report a similar finding with women reporting a significantly higher use of social, emotional and spiritual/philosophical resources than their male counterparts in the study. In addition, women scored significantly lower scores on the physical scale, although the relatively small

mean score differential between the genders may negate any practical implication of this result.

These findings are partially supported by the research of Coetzee, Jansen and Muller (2009). Using the Coping Resources Inventory (Hammer & Marting, 1987) they found that their female participants in the educational field appeared to possess higher social and emotional coping resources than their male counterparts. However, both males and females indicated low physical coping resources while there was no difference in their scores on the spiritual/philosophical coping resource scales, which were higher for both genders overall. In addition, both males and females showed higher cognitive coping resources, with few gender based differences.

2.1.3.3 Employment status

There is no previous research investigating the impact of employment status on the coping resources as conceptualised by Hammer and Marting (1987). There is, however, some evidence in the literature to suggest that non-employed, young people are more likely to utilise emotion based coping resources than their working counterparts and they were generally less stressed than the latter group (Heiman, 2004; Krok, 2008).

2.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL CAREER RESOURCES

In this section the construct of psychological career resources will be defined and the theory explained. The concepts of career resiliency, career adaptability, school-to-work and career transition and psychological and career adjustment will also be discussed.

2.2.1 Conceptualisation

Coetzee (2008a) has developed a theoretical framework which helps to develop a cohesive picture of the way in which the various psychological career resources fit together. Essentially there are five key psychological career resources; namely, career preferences and values, career enablers, career drivers and career harmonisers. It is essential that these are in balance to enable the holistic development of an individual (p. 8).

Coetzee (2008a, pp. 3–4) defines psychological career resources as

> … the set of career-related orientations, values, attitudes, abilities and attributes that lead to self-empowering career behaviour and promote general employability … (and are) also regarded as individuals' inherent resources or meta-competencies which enable them to adapt to changing career circumstances and to shape and

select environments in order to attain success within a particular socio-cultural context.

In a broad sense a meta-competency is considered to be a capability that enables the acquisition of other more specific competencies or abilities (Hall & Chandler, 2005) while, more precisely, career meta-competencies comprise the set of psychological career resources or competencies (knowledge, skills and attributes) which are likely to drive and support the development of an individual's career over time. These psychological career resources include behavioural adaptability, self-insight, general career mindfulness, a sense of purpose, self-esteem and emotional literacy. The appropriate use of career meta-competencies is likely to promote proactive career behaviour and empower the individual to feel in control of his/her employment journey while ultimately leading to high levels of personal fulfilment and satisfaction. All of these will, in turn, be underpinned by a guiding ability to respond to a changing career landscape, both personally and on a macro level (Ferreira et al., 2010).

It is important to note that career meta-competencies function in order to help the individual to organise his/her experiences. In the short term they aid with the identification of both career motives and the drivers of career choices while, in the long term, they help with both the crystallisation of individual criteria for career accomplishment and also the overall development of a unique sense and definition of career success. The latter is likely to function as a controlling mechanism throughout an individual's career journey (Ferreira et al., 2010).

Career consciousness is driven primarily by the psychological career resources profile. Career consciousness/awareness includes career perception and thinking, self-evaluation of the vocational dimensions of a career and the underlying competencies which are likely to support job satisfaction and overall career success (Coetzee, 2008a).

2.2.1.1 Career resiliency

In the context of this research, career resiliency is defined as the study and application of positively orientated human resource strengths and psychological capacities that may, in turn, be measured, developed and effectively managed in the interests of performance improvement in today's workplace. Career resiliency is characterised by a general sense of optimism about one's ability to succeed, both in the present and into the future, flexibility in attaining goals and a well-developed ability to persevere and achieve success (Luthans, Vogelgesang & Lester, 2006). In other words, career resiliency refers to the individual's ability to remain focused and motivated despite personal and professional setbacks and

times of intense change, with the individual requiring little security in the process. Thus, it is the ability to 'bounce back' after encountering challenges, disappointments and obstacles while remaining relatively unafraid of failure and being able to withstand ambiguity (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2007; Van Vuuren & Fourie, 2000).

Individuals who are career resilient are likely to prosper under stressful circumstances in that they are able to adopt a pragmatic and strategic approach to managing the situation and adjust their responses accordingly. Career resiliency enables people to keep trying, even during setbacks, without experiencing permanent damage to both their self-confidence and their inherent belief in their ability to succeed (Luthans et al., 2006). For many young people, the reality of the workplace is often quite different to their initial expectations and they find themselves dealing with both the shock of the actual workplace and the need to integrate quickly into the new setting (Kanye & Crous, 2007). In addition, coming to terms with the differences between their self-perception/self-image and the way in which they are perceived and responded to by their employer may cause extreme personal discomfort and stress (Arnold & Nicholson, 1991). However, career resilience supports the ability to rise to this developmental challenge and proceed with the lifelong career journey.

2.2.1.2 Career adaptability

Survival in this fast-paced, unpredictable and relentlessly changing new world of work demands that employees develop unprecedented levels of flexibility and adaptability (Pulakos, Arad, Donovan & Plamondon, 2000). Parker (2008) describes the emergence of the 'intelligent career' in the 21st century as (a) increased emphasis on the personal meaning of work for the individual (separate from the organisation) and an openness to new career related experiences, (b) ensuring that skills are current and that there is support for ongoing learning and (c) a strong focus on building relationships throughout the organisation, supply chain, sector and informal networks in order to underpin broad career success throughout the life span.

Career adaptability is considered to be a fundamental construct in adult career development and career success overall in the 21st century (Creed, Fallon & Hood, 2009) and is defined as "the readiness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by changes in work and working conditions" (Savickas, 1997, p. 254). Savickas (2005, p. 51) offers a further definition of career adaptability, namely, "a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual's readiness and resources for coping with current and imminent vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and personal traumas". As such, career adaptability may be conceptualised as both an attitude and a set of behaviours/actions which are likely to support

the process of creating and sustaining a fulfilling career throughout a lifetime (Ebberwein, Krieshok, Ulven & Prosser, 2004).

Career adaptability is an action orientated process which involves exploring accessible opportunities, planning for the future, deciding between the options that are available and managing a range of intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental factors which impact on the achievement of goals. These self-regulatory mechanisms are activated during times of stress, change or unusual challenges and enable the individual concerned to exert a degree of control over his/her thoughts, feelings and performance in order to realise career objectives (Creed et al., 2009; Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004).

Griffin and Hesketh (2003) distinguish between three broad types of behavioural adaptability, namely, *proactive behaviour* in terms of which the actions of the individual have a positive effect on the environment which is undergoing change; *reactive behaviour* which is focused on change within the individual in order to adjust to the new environment; and *tolerant behaviour* which occurs when the first two types of behaviour are ineffective and/or inappropriate and the individual is forced to continue to function in the changed environment.

According to Hall (2004), adaptability on its own is insufficient to take successful ownership of one's career and make decisions based on personal values which are grounded in a solid sense of self. However, this may be assisted by an appropriate degree of self-exploration of own interests, values and experiences in order to obtain a meaningful understanding of oneself and related career ambitions (Zikic & Saks, 2009). It is essential that adaptability is accompanied by self-awareness as, together, these two meta-competencies are able to equip the individual to learn from each experience and to continue to develop new competencies autonomously. Without both adaptability and self-awareness the individual may be in danger of neglecting his/her own career path, tending to adopt what is popular or expedient or, at the other extreme, becoming so inflexible and unaware of the environment that action becomes impossible. Within the workplace it is vital that adaptability result in improved or consistent performance during times of change while, on a personal level, it must facilitate the exploration of possible selves and instil in the individual the confidence to achieve multifaceted aspirations (Watson & Stead, 2006).

Van Vianen et al. (2009) assert that the most appropriate time to nurture adaptability is at the start of an individual's career and through exposure to good quality work experiences that are varied, offer opportunities for a wide range of tasks and responsibilities and challenge the young person to explore his/her capacities and ability to acquire new skills.

2.2.1.3 School-to-work transition and career transition

Periods of transition are an entrenched and integral part of career development and are usually impossible to avoid. A transition implies a change from one position to another, demanding shifts in behaviour, motivation and cognition and often resulting in modifications in self-perception and in overall views of the world. At an analytical level, a transition involves changes in the content of work related activities, some form of symbolism announcing the change, adjustments across all life roles and the transmission of messages to the broader social context denoting movement into another phase (Blustein, 1997; Mayrhofer & Iellatchitch, 2005).

According to Heppner (1991, in Yang & Gysbers, 2007), there are five psychological resources which, when developed and accessible, are likely to support the transitional process and reduce its stressful effects. These include:

- **Readiness:** the apparent drive to advance with the career transition
- **Confidence:** linked to the self-efficacy required to effect the transition
- **Control:** the perceived control of the individual over the transition
- **Support:** the available social support during the transition
- **Decision independence:** the autonomy the individual believes he/she has over the career transition decision

Unlike previous eras, the early part of this century offers little certainty and predictability to the young entrant to the workplace. Thus, this already significant life-span developmental task becomes even more challenging as these young people strive to realise vocational goals within the context of decreasing/limited employment options (Tilleczek & Lewko, 2001; Tomasik, Hardy, Haase & Heckhausen, 2009). The process of school-to-work transition takes place when an individual leaves school and begins employment (i.e. enters the labour market) and relates to both graduates and school leavers without further formal education (Jeria, 2009). This phase is the first in a series of significant transitions during the career journey and it lays the foundation for the way in which future career changes will be interpreted and responded to (Wood, Glew & Street, 2004). The experience of success (both objective and subjective) during this phase is likely to impact significantly on the young person's self-efficacy in relation to his/her decision making ability and coping skills as well as general satisfaction with the initial vocational choices and the relative ease with which the young person is integrated into his/her new working environment. Success in the school-to-work transition hinges on the young person finding employment, performing at acceptable organisational levels and having a positive and committed attitude towards both work and

specific job requirements (Heppner, Multon & Johnston, 1994; Minten, 2010; Ng & Feldman, 2007).

The school-to-work transition may be understood in terms of the different roles young people will take on in their social networks and relationships. Each role carries an identity as well as its own set of expectations. The individual self-concept is partly defined by the way in which roles have been internalised and the meaning attached to each. The more salient the role, the greater the meaning it carries for the individual and the larger the contribution to the overall way in which the individual is likely to view and interpret the world. Role identities give the individual a sense of direction and operate as markers through the course of one's life (Ng & Feldman, 2007).

The transition from the role of student to worker is crucial for it is through this early work role identification that the young person establishes the amount of time that will be spent at work relative to other life demands, the degree of positive feeling towards the work role and the way in which he/she is able to express personal values within the work environment. Although not mutually exclusive and notwithstanding the fact that many students have occupied work roles during part-time employment, the crucial distinction is that, during this phase, the work role emerges, for the most part, as the core life role. A high level of work role identification is likely to support the school-to-work transition through increased motivation to achieve career goals and a willingness to learn more about the work environment (Jeria, 2009; Ng & Feldman, 2007).

This transition also involves the development of the concept of work centrality. This concept refers to an individual's beliefs regarding the importance of work and it influences the extent to which work is perceived as a major factor in a young person's life. Importantly, it is considered to be a relatively stable attitude which is not overly sensitive to the conditions of a specific job setting. For young people, opportunities for growth and development in an organisation are significant motivators and, to this end, they are likely to seek out environments that support mutual investment and promote career development (Bal & Kooij, 2011).

A strong work role identification is influenced by a number of different factors including the institutional environment, specific organisational staffing strategies, the group context as well as individual differences. A degree of understanding of the mediating effect of these factors on a successful transition is important for this study as it highlights the interconnectivity between the individual and the environment and also the ultimate goal of optimising the

resources which are available, especially with the South African context (Ng & Feldman, 2007).

The institutional environment refers to both the educational and economic policies that, firstly, align educational opportunities with future employment needs and, secondly, stimulate economic growth which, in turn, energises young people to identify in a more concrete way with their potential work role (Ng & Feldman, 2007).

The organisational setting, through its use of apprenticeships/internships as well as presenting a realistic and honest assessment of the work environment during the recruitment and selection phase, helps the young person develop a clearer understanding of the work role and its demands. Operating from a more pragmatic viewpoint means that the young person is often better prepared for the workplace and, thus, enjoys a smoother transition than would otherwise be the case. This pragmatism is further supported by social networks both in the workplace and at home which, through the increased visibility and availability of appropriate adult role models, who may also transmit important norms and the maturity which is necessary for heightened work role identity (Ng & Feldman, 2007).

From an individual perspective, high levels of proactivity and control over the attainment of goals, self-efficacy and alertness, independence and perseverance are likely to support the development of a work role identity and contribute to a successful transition (Ng & Feldman, 2007; Savickas, 2005).

In addition, most young adults either begin the school-to-work transition with more than one life role or they may accumulate additional roles during the course of the transition. Other major life roles at this stage include occupational roles and family roles. Whilst a work role identifies the individual as having employment the occupational role serves to identify the individual with the skills, values and standards of others with a similar education or in a similar profession. It is possible that the occupational role will reinforce an acceptance of the work role as a core life task and encourage behaviours that support vocational development (Ng & Feldman, 2007; Savickas, 2005).

Identification with the work role may be complicated, but not necessarily always weakened, by simultaneous identification with the family role and this may increase the young person's difficulty in making the school-to-work transition, as competing demands prevent an equal commitment to both (Ng & Feldman, 2007). There is recognition in the literature that the work and family roles are interconnected and must, therefore, be understood holistically in order to facilitate ways in which to develop and maintain the illusive balance between the two (Patel & Cunningham, 2012). It is important to consider that an occupation provides a critical tool for

social integration and also allows for participation in a broader network and community. It is likely that career adaptability will provide the coping resources required for the process of career construction and the individual's consequent societal contribution (Savickas, 2005).

In addition to changes in role identity, the transition to young adult worker may be both a positive and a negative experience, depending on the specific circumstances of the introduction to the world of work and whether this is perceived as stressful and challenging or rewarding and inspiring. Stress-inducing experiences include an abrupt change with the individual having little opportunity to develop and grow into the position. A more positive transition may be characterised by a broader occupational socialisation that takes place long before this stage of the individual's life and which is accompanied by well-established career goals and structural support. Participation in internships and apprenticeships is likely to enhance vocational preparedness and assist in the transition process. It is interesting that research conducted by Elfering, Semmer, Tschan, Kälin and Bucher (2007) suggests that, despite the more commonly accepted view that this transition period is stressful for the individual, the respondents in their study reported positive experiences more frequently than negative ones, thus creating a more favourable overall impression of the early working years.

During this transition, the changes which the young adult is likely to experience will include an increase in responsibility; change in status (e.g. from graduate to employee or membership of a professional group); becoming accustomed to new social relationships, evaluation of the work experience against own expectations, objective performance standards and the skills learned prior to employment; increased financial resources together with the need for greater financial management; adjustment to a full working week and the inevitable pace of the work/leisure interchange; managing career issues, continuing education and workplace well-being and, finally, more personal changes relating to increased independence and personal relationships (Elfering et al., 2007).

The success of the school-to-work transition is dependent upon the presence and quality of integrated family support which is offered as the lifelong journey begins (Behrens & Evans, 2002; Murphy, Blustein & Bohlig, 2010), individual-organisational fit, the ability to deal effectively with all the related challenges as well as the fit between the organisational environment and the multiple roles with which the young person identifies. In addition, this transitional phase is characterised by an important shift from a self-concept largely defined by the student role to one driven by the work role (Ng & Feldman, 2007).

The career transitions experienced during the early career stage are pertinent to this study with the young adult making career decisions which are aligned with new insights and an increased understanding of the complexities of the world of work (Feldman & Whitcomb, 2005). Schlossberg, Waterbilitys and Goodman (1995 cited in Yang & Gysbers, 2007, p. 158) define a career transition as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles”.

This career transition and adjustment may be contextualised in terms of the flexible and perceptually based career stage development model of Super (1990) which is focused on the current circumstances of the individual. In this model the career is divided into the trial, establishment, maintenance and decline phases. The phases are defined by the psychological tasks or adjustments which an individual must accomplish at each stage, regardless of age, although this factor is never totally excluded. Throughout a single career it is possible that an individual will move through the phases a number of times (Super, 1990). In this study the graduates were typically located in the trial stage as they were all less than 30 years old and had been employed for less than two years. The psychological tasks that need to be completed at this stage include individual “identify(ing) interests, capabilities, the fit between self and work, and professional self-image” (Ornstein, Cron & Slocum, 1989, p. 121).

Using the framework of Super (1990) it is possible to make certain predictions about the performance and general career orientation of individuals who are lacking in work experience. The research of Ornstein et al. (1989) suggests that individuals in Super’s trial phase are more likely to make temporary commitments to work, be less dedicated to and involved in their jobs and more willing to relocate and/or leave the organisation in pursuit of increased job satisfaction and career challenges. This early career transition is also characterised by intense change and questioning as the individual makes sense of this new world of work (Schoon & Silbereisen, 2009).

2.2.1.4 Psychological adjustment and career adjustment

Coping, a key concept in this study, is likely to support the adjustment process during the school to work transition phase. The use of cognitive and behavioural resources to find positive meaning in a stressful situation has the potential to promote psychological adjustment, thereby reducing the negative effects of stress including anxiety, depression and reduced self-esteem (Chan, Sanna, Riley, Thornburg, Zumberg & Edwards, 2007; Love & Irani, 2007).

Pulakos et al. (2000) have developed an eight dimension model of adaptive performance which is likely to support career success in this century. Each of the dimensions is briefly explained below:

Dimension	Explanation
• Handing emergencies or crisis situations	• Discerning the urgency of a situation and responding appropriately
• Handling work related stress	• Managing a demanding workload /difficult situations with resilience and composure
• Solving problems creatively	• Generating new and innovative ideas to solving complex problems through a thorough analysis of options and the optimal use of resources
• Dealing with uncertain and unpredictable work situations	• Taking effective action, even in ambiguous situations, by means of a complete analysis of the facts and an understanding of the total picture
• Learning work tasks, technologies and procedures	• Adopting an enthusiastic and participative approach to learning in order to improve performance
• Demonstrating interpersonal ability	• Being flexible and open to the views and inputs of others and willing to adjust one's own view point
• Demonstrating cultural adaptability	• Being open to and willing to learn about diverse cultures and demonstrating respect and sensitivity when dealing with different cultural groups
• Demonstrating physically orientated adaptability	• Adjusting to a physically demanding work environment

2.2.2 Theory: Psychological career resources

The Psychological Career Resources Framework of Coetzee (2008a; 2013) was deemed relevant for the purposes of this study. Coetzee (2008a; 2013) differentiates between the following five domains of psychological career resources: (1) career preferences, (2) career values; (3) skills that enable effective and proactive career planning/self-design, reinvention and development (career enablers); (4) intrinsic career motivations that drive the career actions and intentionalities of individuals (career drivers); and (5) psycho-social career meta-capacities that facilitate resiliency and adaptability within the unique social-cultural contexts of individuals (career harmonisers) .

2.2.2.1 Career preferences and career values

Career preferences and career values are the unique views that people hold about the direction and path their careers should take and which, as a result, guide decision making. The thought processes involved in career decisions are considered to be enduring in an individual and have both a cognitive and a conceptual base. Career preferences guide career moves while career values are likely to motivate a particular career preference. Together, career preferences and career values are considered to constitute the foundation of long term career choices (Coetzee, 2008a, Coetzee & Bergh, 2009).

Career preferences differ from the career values of individuals in that career preferences refer to the activities (career actions) which are undertaken by people in order to realise their career values and, thus, to satisfy the needs underpinning their career preferences (Coetzee, 2013). Coetzee (2008a; 2013) identifies four career preferences in terms of the psychological career resources framework, namely, stability/expertise (need for occupations or jobs that offer stability, predictability and the opportunity to develop one's expertise in a particular field), managerial (need for upward mobility to positions of successively greater responsibility), creativity/variety (need for a career that allows work on a variety of different tasks which requires a wide range of skills, abilities and knowledge which are then used in innovative and creative ways) and autonomy/independence (need for autonomous functioning and freedom from external interruptions). The managerial and autonomy/independence career preferences are positively associated with the need for authority and influence as a dominant career value. On the other hand, the stability/expertise and creativity/variety career preferences appear to be positively associated with the needs of individuals for further growth and development as a dominant career value (Coetzee, 2013).

2.2.2.2 Career enablers

Career enablers are the transferable skills and abilities that help individuals to succeed in their careers. Coetzee (2008a) differentiates between people's practical and creative skills and their self-management and interpersonal relations skills. Practical intelligence and creative intelligence are required in order to implement career options and to ensure that the chosen career options work in innovative and creative ways. In addition, the development of self-other intelligence is important as individuals function within a social context (Coetzee, 2008a; 2013).

2.2.2.3 Career drivers

Career drivers are the attitudes which energise people and motivate career experimentation and employment possibilities, based on views of possible selves and possible work roles. Career action motivations are reflected in the career purpose of an individual (a sense of having a career calling and the higher purpose of being of service to the broader society), career directedness (a sense of clarity about future career directions and goals, where and how to find support for attaining career goals or finding/creating/designing new job/employment opportunities) and career venturing (the willingness and intentionality to take risks in finding/creating/designing and experimenting with new career opportunities) (Coetzee, 2008a; 2013).

2.2.2.4 Career harmonisers

Career harmonisers are the psychological attributes which act both as promoters and controls. They promote flexibility and resilience on the one hand and, on the other, keep the career drivers in balance so that people do not go to the extreme and burn themselves out in the pursuit of a reinvented career (Coetzee, 2008a). Coetzee (2008a; 2013) describes the career harmonisers as important agentic processes that individuals employ in order to affect their psychological state of well-being. The career harmonisers comprise people's self-evaluations in terms of the following (Coetzee, 2013):

- *Self-esteem*: self-evaluation in terms of being capable, worthy, significant and effective in comparison to other members of the social group;
- *Behavioural adaptability*: the capacity to engage autonomously, proactively and courageously in the career action process, deal positively with setbacks, initiate effort and achieve psychological success;

- *Emotional literacy*: the ability to accept and express a range of emotional responses which facilitate career adaptive behaviours in the career construction/design process; and

- *Social connectivity*: the ability to connect with others, and establish and maintain mutually satisfying and supporting relationships in the pursuit of career goals.

2.2.3 Variables impacting on psychological career resources

In this section the influence of gender on the development and expression of psychological career resources will be discussed.

Broad trends from the empirical research are documented below. In research conducted with adults attending a human resource management programme, Ferreira et al. (2010) found the highest mean scores on the growth/development career value and on the career drivers construct of career purpose. The lowest mean score was obtained on the career enablers construct of practical/creative skills.

These findings are mirrored in the work of Coetzee and Schreuder (2009). They conducted research using a sample of employed students and found that the highest mean scores were the career drivers construct of career purpose and the career value of growth/development. The lowest mean score was obtained on the career enablers construct of practical/creative skills.

Research conducted by Coetzee (2008b) with a sample of South African working adults showed that both the males and females achieved high mean scores on the career preference of variety/creativity and the career value of growth/development. Both males and females obtained high mean scores on the career enablers construct of self/other skills variable, the career drivers constructs of career purpose and career directedness as well as the career harmoniser dimensions. The study revealed no significant gender-based differences in the career driver dimensions, the career harmonisers constructs of behavioural adaptability and the career enablers construct of self/other skills.

However, significant differences between males and females were found with the career preferences and career values dimensions, with male participants obtaining significantly higher mean scores than females. In addition, the males obtained significantly higher mean scores on the practical/creativity skills and the self-esteem variables (Coetzee, 2008b).

However, the female participants obtained significantly higher mean scores than the males on the career harmoniser variables of emotional literacy and social connectivity (Coetzee, 2008b).

A study conducted by Coetzee and Bergh (2009) showed that both males and females obtained similar high mean scores for career purpose and career directedness variables (components of career drivers), as well as for self-esteem and behavioural adaptability (components of career harmonisers).

However, significant differences between males and females were seen in the mean scores of the career preference variables of stability/expertise and managerial, with the males obtaining significantly higher mean scores for both variables than the females, as well as for the career harmonisers construct of self-esteem (Coetzee & Bergh, 2009).

It was not possible to find any previous research investigating the influence of employment status on psychological career resources as theorised by Coetzee (2013).

2.3 INTEGRATION: COPING RESOURCES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CAREER RESOURCES

In this section the two key constructs for this study, namely, coping resources and psychological career resources, are theoretically integrated. It is likely that the effective use of psychological career resources in the management and control of the development of an early career despite challenges and setbacks, as well as the concomitant increases in self-esteem and belief in oneself, is an empowering experience overall. In addition, this sense of empowerment is likely to promote self-confidence and also the development and employment of the more general coping resources, which may then be accessed during stressful situations (Kinicki et al., 2000).

The following table depicts the integration of psychological career resources and career resources on a theoretical level.

Table 2.1

Theoretical integration: psychological career resources and coping resources

Construct	Psychological career resources (Coetzee, 2008a; 2013)	Coping resources (Hammer & Marting, 1987)
Conceptualisation	The individual's attitudes, beliefs, values and interests which help to shape the career orientation which, in turn, lays the foundation for the development of the career meta competencies of the Psychological Career Resources model.	The individual is able to access coping resources that are either intrinsic or extrinsic – the efficacy depends on the way in which the coping resources are employed and whether they are an appropriate response to the stressor.
Core dimensions	Five key psychological career resources, namely, career preferences and values, career enablers, career drivers and career harmonisers, form the basis for adaptive career behaviour and must be in balance to ensure holistic career development.	The five domains of spiritual, emotional, cognitive, physical and social, comprise the resources which are available for coping with stress in different contexts.
Core influencing variables	Individual values, attitudes and abilities that contribute to the development of an overall career orientation including successful career behaviour and overall employability. Gender, employment status and culture are likely to impact on the way in which psychological career resources manifest in the individual and are ultimately utilised.	Belief that resources may be developed over time through conscious effort, regular use and positive experiences. Gender, employment status and culture are likely to impact on the development of the coping resources profile.
Implications for career counselling and career decision making	Deepens an understanding of the career behaviour of young graduates. Identifies the focus areas for development in order to ensure that new entrants develop all the career meta competencies required for proactive career development and management. Lays a solid foundation for career well-being at the start of a career which will, hopefully, evolve and be employed throughout the span of the career. Drives and enables proactive career behaviour and adaptability.	Contributes to an overall understanding of the resources which individuals employ to cope when under stress, especially during the early career phase. Informs the design and development of appropriate interventions in order to facilitate the development of positive, cognitive-behavioural, adaptive capacities. Deepens an understanding of the resources which need to be developed in order to cope with transitions and stressors in the work-career environment and to realise career well-being.

2.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR CAREER COUNSELLING AND CAREER DECISION MAKING

An understanding of the coping resources and psychological career resources used by young graduates as they enter the world of work will enhance career counselling practices. This, in turn, will enable the further development of the individual's ability to manage a career proactively through appropriate career choices in a transitional career setting, whilst continuing to promote organisational commitment and attachment and appreciating that they are not mutually exclusive concepts, as they both contribute to the overall employability of the young entrant. This will allow a shift in focus from planning to developing ways in which the young person may become fully engaged, through a strong emphasis on the development and accessing of career meta competencies as operationalised in this study of psychological career resources (Baruch, 2003; Coetzee, 2008a; 2013).

In addition, this study will contribute to an initial understanding of the relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources and the way in which the development of the former can contribute to the improvement of effective coping in other areas of the young person's work-career life, through the enhancement of both intrinsic and extrinsic coping resources as discussed in this study (Coetzee, 2008a). It is important to note that there is increasing acknowledgement in the literature that emotions and cognitive processes are interlinked and that, through the intelligent use of the former, career decision making may be enhanced rather than inhibited. The consequent adaptive nature of affect is likely to provide the young entrant with a powerful tool for navigating uncertain economic times while trying to optimise career decisions (Emmerling & Cherniss, 2003). Both coping resources and psychological career resources have an emotion-based component and, by identifying deficiencies and areas of strength in their use, career counsellors and career guidance practitioners will be better placed to provide focused support during the career decision making processes of graduates'.

This information is also relevant to the broader field of industrial and organisational (IO) psychology as it is likely to contribute to further our understanding of the way in which well-developed psychological career resources may have a positive influence overall on the effectiveness of an organisation – the setting in which industrial and organisational psychologists ultimately apply psychological theory and understanding (Rothmann & Cilliers, 2007).

Figure 2.2 below depicts the interrelationship between the concepts of psychological career resources and coping resources as well as the implications of these interrelationships for career counselling.

It is highly likely that an individual's attitudes, beliefs, values and interests contribute to the development of a general career orientation which, in turn, constitutes the building blocks of the career meta competencies. These career meta competencies are the proactive career behaviours which underpin the ability to ensure a positive outcome as regards the quality and nature of a career, as well as the organisational environment (De Vos et al., 2009). The career meta competencies, in turn, will play a role in the development of psychological career resources which are the specific and inherent career resources which an individual may access at the start of, and throughout, the career journey. These psychological career resources assist with adapting to changing career demands as well as operating as an internal compass for directing career success. In addition, through the integration of all the meta competencies they provide a feedback mechanism for measuring individual career success. Psychological career resources are likely to support the development of both the intrinsic and extrinsic coping resources which make an overall contribution to an increasingly adjusted, proactive and committed graduate. Such a graduate will, in turn, continue to interact in the work setting and, as a result of experience, exposure, access to career counselling opportunities and support, be in a constant process of development and maturation. This, in turn, will continue to impact on the graduate's attitudes, beliefs, values and interests and, thus, the development process will continue throughout the individual's life time (Coetzee, 2013).

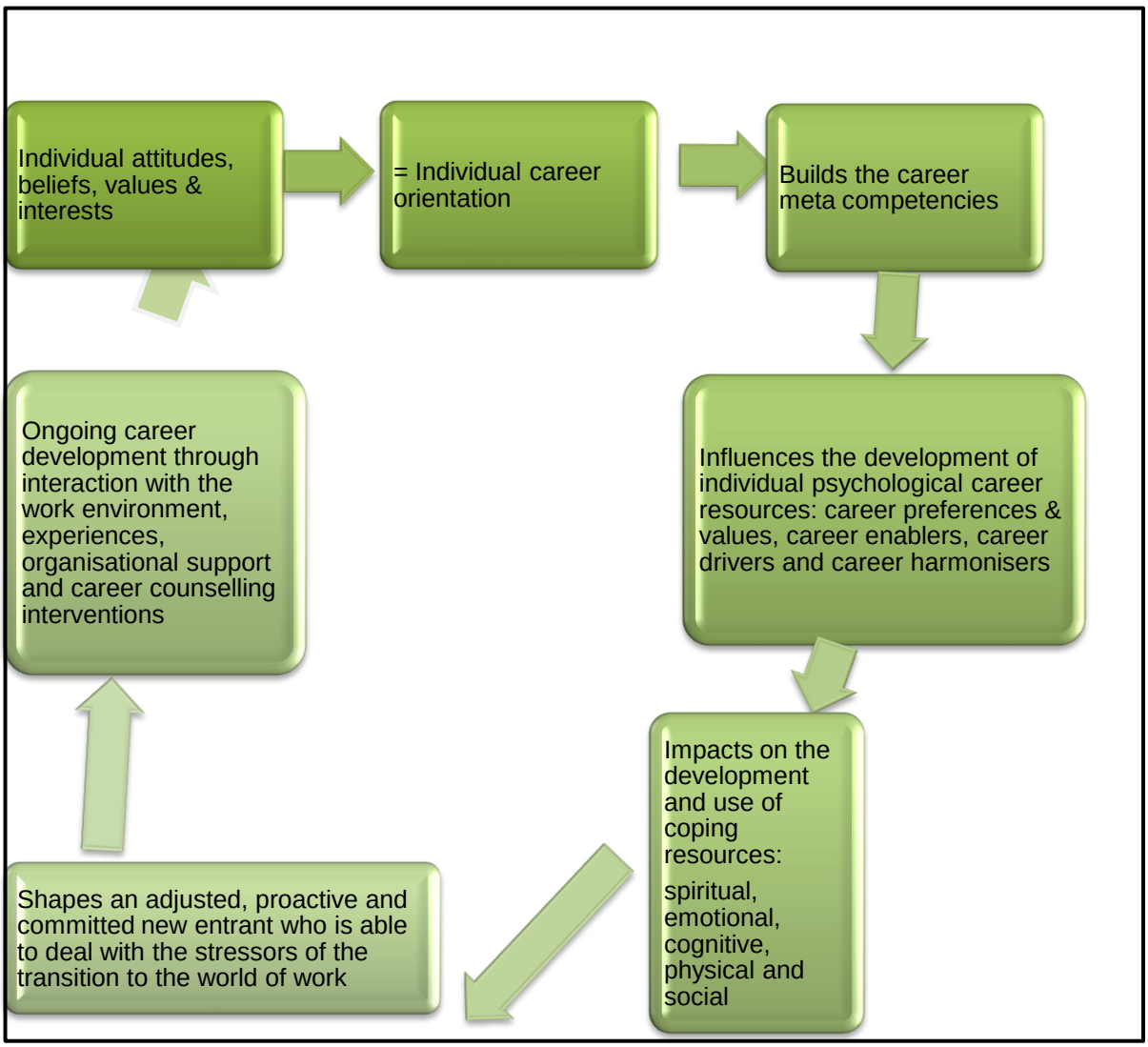

Figure 2.1: Integration of psychological career resources and coping resources

2.5 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Reber and Reber (2001, pp. 333–334) define a hypothesis as a cautious statement, proposition or supposition that functions as a possible explanation for a specific set of data. The aim of the hypothesis testing approach is to demonstrate the falsity of the null hypothesis in terms of which no relationship/no difference exists between the two clearly defined variables.

The literature review was used to formulate the hypotheses for this quantitative study. These hypotheses are presented in Table 2.2.

The research hypotheses will be empirically tested in the empirical study which is presented in Chapter 3.

Table 2.2

Research hypotheses

Research aim	Research hypothesis
Research aim 1: To explore the nature of the statistical relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources as found in a sample of young, early career, South African graduates in the school-to-work transition phase of their lives.	**Research hypothesis 1**: The psychological career resources of individuals significantly and positively relate to their coping resources.
Research aim 2: To explore whether psychological career resources positively and significantly predict the coping resources of individuals.	**Research hypothesis 2:** The psychological career resources of individuals positively and significantly predict their coping resources.
Research aim 3: To assess whether individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources.	**Research hypothesis 3:** Individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources.

2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented an overview of the central constructs of this study, namely, psychological career resources and coping resources, as based on the literature review. The chapter concluded with the theoretical integration of the two constructs.

Thus, it may be stated that the following literature research aims have been achieved:

Research aim 1: To investigate the way in which coping resources and psychological career resources are conceptualised in the literature

Research aim 2: To investigate the nature of the relationship between coping resources and psychological career resources

Research aim 3: To identify the variables impacting on coping resources and psychological career resources

Research aim 4: To propose theoretical recommendations for career counselling and guidance practices

Chapter 3 presents the empirical study in the form of a research article.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH ARTICLE

The relationship between the coping resources and psychological career resources of graduates

Abstract

Orientation: The increasingly stressful environment in which young South African graduates must seek out employment has raised increased concerns about their capacity to cope with the myriad of early career demands made of them.

Research purpose: This study explores the relationship between coping resources (as measured by the Coping Resources Inventory) and psychological career resources (as measured by the Psychological Career Resources Inventory) and whether individuals from different gender and employment status groups (part-time work experience versus no work experience) differ significantly regarding their coping resources and psychological career resources.

Motivation for the study: In view of the proliferation of graduate unemployment and the mismatch of skills in the labour market, young graduates in the school-to-work transition phase of their lives face a challenging and often lengthy road when actively seeking employment in South Africa. It often happens that years elapse between graduation and their securing their first job. There is, thus, an urgent need for career counsellors and practitioners to understand fully both the psychosocial resources which young people employ in order to cope with this stressful time in their lives as well as the career resources they use to make important career decisions during this early career stage.

Research design, research approach or method: A cross-sectional survey design and quantitative statistical procedures (correlations, multiple regression and tests for mean differences) were used in order to analyse data. A purposive, non-probability sample of N = 197 early career, unemployed, black graduates participated in the study.

Main findings: The study confirmed the existence of a statistical relationship between coping resources and psychological career resources with the results showing that the psychological career resources of career harmonisers and career enablers positively and significantly predicted the participants' coping resources. However, it was also found that males and females differed significantly regarding their emotional, spiritual and physical coping resources and career harmonisers and career drivers. In addition, those participants who had had part-time work experience had a significantly higher need for career venturing and also higher behavioural adaptability than those who had no work experience.

Practical implications: The information obtained from this study may be used by career counsellors and career guidance practitioners to develop an inclusive career framework that takes into account the specific needs of young, early career graduates during the work-to-school transition phase as well as providing important guidelines for organisations as they look for ways in which to support and retain young entrants during the early phase of their career construction.

Contribution/value add: There is a lack of empirical data on the relationship between the constructs measured in this research in general and, in particular, on young, early career graduates. Overall there is a paucity of research on South African graduates. The findings of this research, therefore, add valuable, new knowledge to the field of career psychology as the discipline strives to meet the needs of both organisations and new employees aspiring to enter the organisational setting.

Keywords: Coping resources, psychological career resources, stress, career adaptability, employability, school-to-work transition, early career

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The following section aims to explain the focus and background of the study. General trends found in the literature will be considered and the aims and potential contribution of the study identified.

3.1.1 Key focus of the study

Ensuring sustainable access to suitable employment opportunities beyond tertiary studies remains an ongoing task in the post democracy, South African employment landscape. South Africa also faces the additional challenge of dealing with the historical and unequal distribution of resources between the various sections of the population (Irvine, 2000). There is, thus, a need to manage the results of this previous imbalance. These results include a lack of access to work opportunities coupled with a structural mismatch between the supply of and demand for skills (Pauw et al., 2008).

This, in turn, has created an increasingly stressful environment in which young, early career, South African graduates must seek out employment and, once employed, manage the myriad of early career demands placed on them by an often demanding and challenging organisation (Maggiori, Johnston, Krings, Massoudi & Rossier, 2013). These demands include dealing with the evolving nature of the 21st century world of work which is characterised by, among other things, decreased employment certainty, rapidly changing technology, less clearly defined organisationally driven career paths as well as relentless pressure to remain current and competent in one's chosen occupational area, independent of the opportunities afforded by the organisation (Marock, 2008; Pauw et al., 2008).

From the outset, the young graduate is expected to be focused, motivated, driven, highly flexible and responsive to both organisational expectations as well as individual perceptions and hopes about what is means to be employed at the start of a career (Sortheix, Dietrich, Chow & Salmela-Aro, 2013). It is, thus, essential that successful career counselling and career guidance in such an environment assists young people to develop goal directed behaviour that supports proactive career planning and healthy career decision making which, in turn, will empower them to simultaneously build a career for themselves whilst making the transition from graduate to employee (Coetzee & Esterhuizen, 2010; Rottinghaus, Buelow, Matyja & Schneider, 2012).

The focus of this study is the psychosocial career resources and coping resources that this young, early career, graduate group employ in order to cope effectively with this multifaceted and stressful time in their lives.

3.1.2 Background to the study

In full recognition of the systemic and pervasive unequal distribution of educational resources and employment opportunities, the South African government in the last twenty years has developed strategies and initiatives designed to address these inequalities through formal funding mechanisms and the intensive involvement of private sector organisations. The aim is to stimulate interest, commitment and, ultimately, compliance in addressing these imbalances (Irvine, 2000). Work Readiness Programmes, such as the one attended by the participants in this study, is one such initiative and represents focused cooperation between a Sector Education Training Authority (FASSET), an educational institution (University of Johannesburg), organisations (Deloitte as well as FASSET registered employers) and a private sector service provider (Stanley Hutchison and Associates). The Work Readiness Programme focuses on the development of skills deemed essential for employment purposes, including critical thinking, leadership skills, interpersonal skills, information technology skills and the cultivation of a strong work ethic (Rosenberg, Heimler & Morote, 2012). Through sustainable programmes such as the Work Readiness Programme, young, early career and previously disadvantaged graduates are taught some of the crucial competencies required in order to be effective in the contemporary world of work. A significant component of this work readiness efficacy involves enhancing one's employability and, thus, increasing one's chances of finding suitable employment (Pool & Sewell, 2007).

It is essential that employability be developed within the context of both labour market uncertainty and significant rates of unemployment (Arnett, 2000; Clarke & Patrickson, 2008). There are a range of interpretations of employability in the literature. However, the common tenets of the concept include (1) the general and more specific knowledge, skills and attributes the person has to offer the workplace, (2) the skills necessary to seek out employment opportunities, (3) the ability to attract a potential employer's attention through appropriate CV writing and effective interviewing skills, (4) the ability to optimise the use of existing knowledge, skills and attributes in finding employment and, simultaneously, control the influence of personal circumstances on this process, (5) self-esteem and self-belief in one's ability to find employment, (6) knowing when to employ specific knowledge and strategies, (7) appropriate decision making skills, (8) the ability to incorporate reflection and evaluation into the holistic management of one's career and (9) general work and life experiences that augment the chances of finding employment (Boden & Nedeva, 2010; Pool & Sewell, 2007).

The private and public sector employer involvement in Work Readiness Programmes means that the participants are enabled to use the competencies and experience they have acquired on such programmes, thus, reinforcing the learning and significantly improving their future employability. It is likely that participation in a Work Readiness Programme increases belief in one's ability to perform specific tasks and also generates hope about the prospect of finding suitable employment. This, in turn, enhances optimism about the future and engenders the career transition confidence necessary in order to be able to tackle the world of work as a new entrant (Rottinghaus et al., 2012).

The relationship between coping resources and psychological career resources is likely to play a role in the development of the vocational and career self. In the context of this study, coping resources represent the adaptive, cognitive-behavioural capacities which are inherent in individuals and which enable them to handle stressors in the work-career environment more effectively, to experience fewer or less intense symptoms resulting from exposure to a career-related stressor and/or to recover faster after being exposed to such stressors (Coetzee & Esterhuizen, 2010; Hammer & Marting, 1987). On the other hand, psychological career resources represent the individual's self-awareness of his/her career behaviour and identity (career preferences, motives and values) and also the psycho-social career meta-competencies (career enablers, career drivers and career harmonisers) that he/she may draw upon in order to proactively manage the career development and management process in a more turbulent and uncertain work-career context (Coetzee, 2013). The career self performs an evaluative and corrective role over the vocational self in that, through the creation of meaning, behaviour may be directed as life themes and career values, beliefs and goals emerge and become more defined for the young adult (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2008).

This study aims to explore whether the psychological career resources of individuals significantly relate to and predict their coping resources. In other words, the study aims to assess whether the self-perceptions of an individual's psychosocial career resources (as an aspect of the vocational self) either strengthen or diminish the cognitive-behavioural adaptive capacities as represented by the individual's coping resources. The development of coping and adaptive resources has become essential for managing a career in the more turbulent employment contexts (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Coping resources help individuals to cope with the negative physiological effects of the social or environmental stressors (Hammer & Marting, 1987) which may affect their career well-being (Coetzee, 2013; Johnston et al., 2013). Understanding the way in which career-related psychosocial resources strengthen the capacity of individuals both to cope with and to adapt to change and uncertainty in the work-

career environment has, therefore, become an important research theme in the careers literature (Coetzee, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

3.1.3 Trends from the research literature

The following section contains a brief summary of the dominant trends which emerged from the research literature as regards the two main variables of the study, namely, psychological career resources and coping resources. Relevant theories and findings from the literature will be used to explain the variables.

3.1.3.1 Psychological career resources

Psychological career resources refer to the inherent meta-competencies which are essential for psychosocial adaptation to uncertain career conditions and for influencing, as well as shaping, the environment in order to attain career success within a particular social and cultural context (Coetzee, 2013). An individual's psychological career resources profile elucidates his/her dominant career consciousness which comprises mindful career-related awareness of and reasoning about the unique career preferences and values, and career meta-competencies (career enablers, career drives and career harmonisers) which are understood and interpreted as assisting in the realisation of career success in the individual's unique environment. A well-developed and balanced psychological career resources profile is likely to promote proactive career behaviour, general employability, coping during times of stress and a positive, subjective work experience (Coetzee, 2013).

Psychological career resources are, therefore, considered fundamental for supporting an individual in the pursuit of a boundaryless and protean career. The former is characterised by job mobility, transferable competencies and extensive networks which help to sustain a career, while the latter acknowledges the self-motivation, responsibility and capacity required to actively seek opportunities, update skills and recognise the need for ongoing learning in order to remain both relevant and autonomous (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008; Creed, Macpherson & Hood, 2011).

The following five dimensions may be identified and explained in terms of Coetzee's (2007; 2008a; 2013) Psychological Career Resources Framework:

Career preferences and career values: These refer to the unique views which people have about the meaning of a career as well as the direction and path their careers should take and, as a result, they guide career decision making. The individual thought processes relating to career decisions are considered to be enduring and have both a cognitive and a conceptual base. Career preferences guide career moves while career values are likely to

motivate a particular career preference. Together, however, they are considered to be the guiding foundation for long-term career choices (Coetzee, 2008a, Coetzee & Bergh, 2009). There are four career preferences cited in the Psychological Career Resources Framework. From these four career preferences it is possible to identify two career values, namely, *stability/expertise* (preference for occupations that are stable and predictable whilst providing opportunities to develop expert skills in one's chosen field) and *creativity/variety* (preference for working on a number of different tasks which require the development of a wide ranging set of competencies and the opportunity to use these competencies in innovative ways). These two career preferences are associated with the **growth and development career value**. The last two career preferences are *managerial* (preference for occupations that will allow for steady progression and increase in responsibility) and *autonomy/independence* (preference for self-directed work away from outside distractions). These two career preference are associated with the **authority and influence career value**. Research suggests that well-differentiated career preferences and values contribute to higher levels of subjective career well-being, career adaptability, a greater commitment of resources to career related activities and a degree of objective career success (Coetzee, 2013; Coetzee & Schreuder, 2012).

Career enablers: These are the crucial transferable skills which are required for career success within an individual's unique socio-cultural context. Coetzee (2007) distinguishes between *practical/creative skills,* which help the individual to put into effect career options and make the choices work in novel ways, and *self/other skills,* which are the intra personal abilities of self-awareness, motivation and self-discipline and the inter-personal skills which are necessary for empathetic and meaningful connections with people. It is likely that career enablers enhance a sense of connection and belonging with others in the workplace, career commitment and overall organisational involvement (Coetzee, 2013).

Career drivers: These are the orientations which energise, motivate and mobilise individuals to engage in purposeful career experimentation and an exploration of employment opportunities, based on considered views of the potential selves and possible work roles. There are three components to this psychological career resource. Firstly, *career purpose* is the sense of a higher vocational calling that involves being of service to the broader society. Career purpose is grounded in an inner confidence and a strong conviction that personal goals are achievable. A well-developed career calling is often associated with higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of absenteeism, as well as the ability to recover from setbacks (Coetzee, 2013). Secondly, *career directedness* is the sense of clarity about future career directions and objectives as well as knowledge about where and how to access

support for the attainment of career goals, including creating new employment opportunities. Thirdly, *career venturing* is the willingness to take intentional risks both to find and then experiment with new career opportunities during the career construction process (Coetzee, 2008a). Research indicates that career drivers are linked to job and career satisfaction as well as to the overall perception of work as meaningful (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2012). There is also some evidence to suggest that clear and well defined career goals are likely to encourage engagement in health stimulating activities that are, in turn, likely to increase overall well-being and optimism about both the self and life in general (Coetzee & Esterhuizen, 2010).

Career harmonisers: These are the psychological attributes which act both as promoters and controllers of mental well-being. They promote flexibility and resilience, on the one hand, and, on the other, they keep the career drivers in equilibrium so that individuals do not go to extremes and burn themselves out during career construction and any other related periods of transition. As theorised by Coetzee (2007) there are four career harmonisers. The first is *emotional literacy* which is the degree to which individuals are able to accept and express a range of affect. Positive emotional responses facilitate career adaptive behaviours in the overall career construction process. Secondly, *social stability* is the ability to connect with others and maintain mutually supportive relationships which are essential for career goal pursuit. Thirdly, *behavioural adaptability* is the ability to engage independently in proactive career actions, deal with obstacles in a resilient way and make personal behavioural changes in order to meet career related needs. Fourthly, *self-esteem* reflects the degree to which an individual feels worthy, significant and effective when comparing the self to others in the social reference group. Research conducted by Coetzee and Schreuder (2012) shows that career harmonisers are significant predictors of life, job and career satisfaction, an overall sense of happiness and the perception of work as meaningful.

Psychological Career Resources underpin the key concepts at the core of the new economy career arrangement (see Figure 3.1) (Creed et al., 2011). These key concepts are explored extensively in the literature and include (1) career adaptability, (2) perceived employability and (3) career exploration. These constructs are briefly explained below:

Career adaptability: This enables an individual to proactively cope with and manage unexpected change and ambiguity, tackle challenges rather than contemplate barriers and utilise reflection and self-awareness in order to assess personal progress and overall career effectiveness (Creed et al., 2011). Career adaptability provides an operational framework for understanding the way in which an individual views his/her future and enables the development of appropriate supportive career development strategies.

Savickas (2005) has conceptualised four dimensions of career adaptability which are viewed as general adaptive resources. The first dimension is ***career concern*** which relates to a future orientation and interest in and also optimism about tomorrow. Career concern promotes a focus on planning for the future, on the choices required to achieve the desired outcomes and the ability to envision a prospective successful career. The second dimension is ***career control*** which is concerned with individuals both feeling and believing that they are truly responsible for their own career construction. It involves intentional and assertive action and decision making. The third dimension is ***career curiosity*** which relates to inquisitiveness about both the self and the world of work and the way in which the two entities may fit together. It involves an openness to and an interest in new experience, and the ability to reflect on these experiences and then integrate the new information with the individual's expanding knowledge base of the self and the work environment. The last dimension is ***career confidence*** which is the self-confidence and self-efficacy required to manage challenges, overcome obstacles and make career choices whilst remaining firm in the belief that a successful career outcome will be achieved, regardless of the difficulties. Optimal career development requires an equilibrium between the four dimensions. Beyond moderate disequilibrium, which produces unique career patterns, longer delays or significantly underdeveloped or retarded factors are likely to manifest as career indifference, career indecision, lack of realism and career inhibition in the individual (Savickas, 2005).

Perceived employability: Increased levels of job insecurity have seen the emergence of this important 21st-century career resource which is defined by the individual's perception of available job opportunities in both the internal and external labour market. It is likely to enhance career self-management and promote proactive career attitudes which are sufficiently robust to ensure a successful career outcome despite uncertainty and change (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2010). The literature suggests that a perceived employability orientation is likely to be supported by individual openness and initiative. Openness relates to a receptiveness to new ideas and changes while initiative is the ability to be proactive and work autonomously without constant reliance on taking direction (Van Dam, 2004).

Career exploration: This relates to the activities in which an individual engages in an effort both to relate self-knowledge to the external and internal world (cognition, knowledge and mental schema) and to remain open to experience, learning and the inevitable self-discovery to which this leads. Career exploration is both interactive and iterative and is linked to experience, personality traits, vocational interests and career related behaviours (Fan, Cheung, Leong & Cheung, 2012).

Research conducted by Fan et al. (2012) suggests that the cultural context of an individual is an important environmental variable which impacts on the relationship between career exploration, personality and vocational interest. It is likely that, in collectivist cultures, social factors, including family dynamics, may influence individual interests and behaviours, For example, greater importance is attached to interpersonal relationships in a collectivist culture than in a more individualistic one.

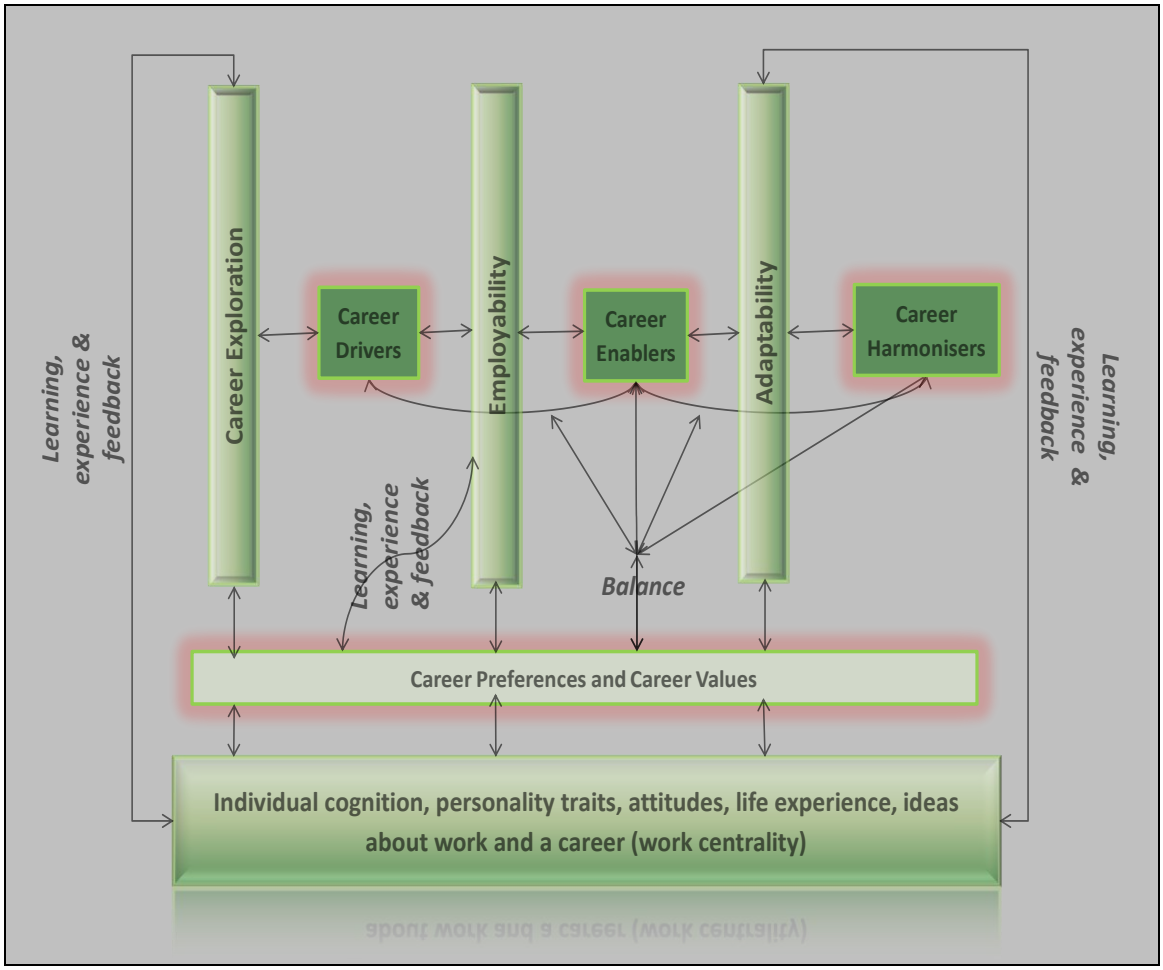

Figure 3.1: Integration of the central tenets of a contemporary career and psychological career resources

3.1.3.2 Coping resources

As discussed in Chapter 1, the school-to-work transition phase may be both energising and traumatic. This phase is often characterised by a high degree of complex, vague and unfamiliar problems, the mere existence of which may be stress inducing. It is essential that the young person seek ways in which to achieve stability within this context of change, while remaining mindful of the long term significance of decisions made at this point of his/her career. Career adaptability provides the mechanism for coping with these challenges while

simultaneously building a career, establishing a working life and, ultimately, implementing the unique self-concept (Savickas, 2005; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

It is likely that high perceptions of stress, including financial stress and/or time and work related stress during this transition phase, may reduce individual self-efficacy and the resources available for proactive career behaviour. This, in turn, will impact negatively on the attainment of career goals. It is, therefore, fundamental that young, early career graduates learn to cope with stress at this critical time in their careers (Dietrich et al., 2012).

In the literature, coping is defined as a range of cognitive and behavioural approaches which are used to manage both environmental and internal demands at a time when an individual's resources are either stretched or exceeded in an effort to reduce the internal conflict and subsequent stress (Coyne, Aldwin & Lazarus, 1981, cited in Latack & Havlovic, 1992, p. 480).

Coping resources are considered to be the enduring and consistent characteristics and behaviours that facilitate the more efficient management of stress, thus reducing the number of signs of stress and lessening the intensity of symptoms. This allows for a quicker recovery after exposure to a stressor (Zeidner & Hammer, 1990).

Zeidner and Hammer (1990) assert that coping resources are the precursors to taking action and are likely to intervene at three different points on the stress–distress continuum: firstly, before the stressful occurrence; secondly, between the event and the stressful outcome and, thirdly; between the stressful outcome and the physical and psychological responses to the stressful outcome. Depending upon when coping resources are deployed they will assist with either removing or adjusting the source of stress, controlling the meaning of the stressful event so it is kept in appropriate perspective and promoting normative emotional responses to the stress.

Coping and the deployment of resources are often discussed in relation to a sense of coherence and, thus, it is necessary to discuss this concept briefly.

A sense of coherence is the expression of an individual's view of his/her internal and external environment and is rooted in a social, historical and cultural context as well as in life experiences (Deci & Ryan, 2009). Social coherence is underpinned by positive adjustment which governs the degree to which people cope with challenges and difficulties with confidence, purpose, and optimism. The three tenets of social coherence are: (1) that stimuli from the external environment are ordered and predictable (*comprehensible*), (2) resources

are available and may be employed (*manageable*) and (3) that demands or difficulties have significance, are challenging and are worth investing in (*meaningful)* (Heiman, 2004).

A strong sense of coherence is observed in people who are conscious of challenges, do not ignore these challenges, are confident that difficulties will be resolved and approach their lives with an inherent belief that they are able to cope with the inevitable pressures of daily life. A sense of coherence is not a static concept and it may be altered over time after the experience of stress, significant life events and/or emotional fluctuations (Antonovsky, 1979; Heiman, 2004).

A study conducted by Arnett (2000) found that urbanised young people (aged between 21 and 28) in a Western society and from relatively low socioeconomic backgrounds were more optimistic than their more affluent counterparts who had at least one parent with a college degree. In the same study, the participants highlighted the importance of personal relationships as a fundamental basis for happiness.

Environmental support coming from family, friends, the workplace, community and educational institutions is an important resource for managing uncertainty and developing career adaptability (Savickas, 2005). The affirmation derived from strong environmental, relational support is likely to increase levels of self-esteem, efficacy and the general ability to cope, especially in times of stress (Creed et al., 2011). In addition, solid relationships with parents are likely to facilitate positive adjustment during times of transition, as is a general optimism about the ability to adapt to stressful situations (Heiman, 2004).

A significant portion of the literature deals with the coping benefits derived from obtaining support from others. However, more recent studies suggest that there may be even more health benefits to be derived from helping others rather than from receiving support (Diener, Wirtz, Tov, Kim-Prieto, Choi, Oishi & Biswas-Dienar, 2010). Whilst Hammer and Marting's (1987) definition of social support that is used for measuring coping resources in this study does not specifically include this dimension, it is worth noting as a recent trend in the literature.

Research suggests that young people (aged 28 and over) reported a preference for task-orientated coping, while younger people (aged 20 to 27) indicated a reliance on emotion-based coping and social support from friends and other important people in their lives (Heiman, 2004). On the other hand, women utilised more emotion-based and avoidance coping approaches than men, while non-working students employed more emotion-based coping in relation to their working counterparts and were generally less stressed than the latter group (Heiman, 2004; Krok, 2008).

Zeidner and Hammer (1990; 1992) reported higher total coping resources scores and higher social resources and emotional resources scores for females than for males. However, males scored significantly higher on physical resources than females.

In their work on well-being, Diener and Seligman (2004) found that religious beliefs appear to mitigate the effects of stressors, such as unemployment and low income, and that they help to promote positive emotion, engagement, satisfaction and meaning, despite personal setbacks.

Religion is an important psychosocial resource as it encourages a way of thinking that enables people to understand their personal limitations, recognise what is beyond their control and look outside of themselves for perspective and solutions. Religion provides a moral framework to which all aspects of an individual's life may be connected. It also offers a mainly positive social network which is a source of support and affirmation (Patel & Cunningham, 2012). Deci and Ryan (2009) assert that the reasons why people engage in religious practices are more beneficial to overall well-being than the religious behaviours themselves.

Linked to religion, the broader and multidimensional concept of spirituality also appears to have an impact on coping. Spirituality refers to the relationship with self, others, sacred entity/God or nature, as well as openness to and tolerance of belief structures other than one's own. Spirituality provides an important cognitive and emotional resource to help people make sense of the stress and difficulties in their lives and remain hopeful and resolved through adversity (Hammer & Marting, 1987). Research conducted by Krok (2008) shows that woman are more likely than men to access spiritual forms of coping when under strain.

In their study of stress in the South African Police Service, Pienaar and Rothmann (2003) found significant reliance on religious coping across all the ranks and across the racial groups. In their study, black people obtained higher emotional coping scores than the other three racial groups.

This study used the Classical Framework of Coping Resources of Hammer and Marting (1987). The framework includes the following five coping resources which an individual is able to use during times of stress:

Cognitive resources: This is the apparent sense of self-worth, a positive view towards and of others and a general sense of optimism. It is expressed in a positive self-concept.

Social: This is the degree to which an individual is rooted in social networks that can be easily accessed during times of stress.

Emotional: This is the extent to which individuals are able to recognise and display a range of emotional responses in order to improve the negative consequences of stress.

Spiritual/philosophical: This is the degree to which actions are guided by unwavering and constant values derived from an individual's personal philosophy and/or religious, familial or cultural mores. This may assist in assigning meaning during times of stress.

Physical: This is the extent to which health promoting activities are engaged in so as to increase physical well-being and mitigate the negative effects of stress and/or enable faster recovery.

Individuals with high coping resources are likely to have a well-developed sense of coherence (Heiman, 2004) and are often regarded as robust and resilient, while those with apparent low coping resources are perceived to be both vulnerable and exposed (Zeidner & Hammer, 1992).

3.1.3.3 Psychological career resources in relation to coping resources

Recent studies have found relationships between psychological career resources and well-being in young graduates (Coetzee & Esterhuizen, 2010), individual career anchors (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2009), subjective work experience and career orientations (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2012) as well as organisational commitment (Ferreira et al., 2010).

In view of the fact that psychological career resources are viewed as meta-competencies which promote career consciousness and enable proactive career behaviours, it is essential that their impact on coping resources be identified and understood. Further, Bandura (2006) maintains that personal agency is fundamental to the effective self-management of health, of which coping during times of stress is a key element.

As discussed above, gender is likely to influence both the psychological career resources and coping resources profiles as a result of differences regarding which resources are accessed more frequently. Emotion-based coping, social support and the spiritual/philosophical coping resources are likely to be a female preference with men accessing physical coping resources more frequently than women.

There is some support in the literature to suggest that gender may account for significant differences in the way men and women define and then pursue career goals and access different sets of meta-competencies in the process of career construction (Coetzee, 2008b).

Unemployment is likely to have a significantly negative effect on the psychological well-being of those seeking employment as a result of the depletion of available resources to mitigate the harmful effects of the stress that unemployment creates. The loss of motivation, lack of access to employment networks coupled with a diminishing career-identity and a weakening of the skills set available for finding employment are important factors in understanding the effects of unemployment on the psycho-social resources under investigation in this study (Koen et al., 2012).

To this end, the following hypotheses are stated:

- **H1**: The psychological career resources of individuals relate significantly and positively to their coping resources
- **H2**: The psychological career resources of individuals positively and significantly predict their coping resources
- **H3**: individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources

3.1.4 Research objectives

In light of the above understanding of psychological career resources and coping resources, it would appear that there are commonalities and also a potential relationship between the two constructs. Psychological career resources relate broadly to career adaptive behaviour that promotes and supports employability while coping resources relate to the resources which are employed in order to navigate and manage stress. It is likely that those individuals who display well developed career meta-competencies also possess a wide range of coping resources on which to draw when meeting the demands of the 21st career in its many shapes and forms. However, as is evidenced by the marked absence in the literature, there is little empirical evidence to support the existence of a relationship between the two constructs.

The aims of this study are, therefore, to explore the nature of the empirical relationship between coping resources and psychological career resources and to assess whether psychological resources positively and significantly predict the coping resources of individuals. The study further aims to assess whether individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources.

3.1.5 The potential value added by the study

There is a pressing need to recognise the way in which young people are dealing with the inimitable challenges of carving out “new economy careers” (Creed et al., 2011, p.369) in relation to which full time, life-long employment is no longer guaranteed.

The older manager (Baby Boomers and Generation X) may regard the new entrants (Generation Y) as “needy”, demanding and lacking responsibility and, through this judgement, may miss that this group needs definite direction and management support balanced with a degree of freedom and flexibility (Senior & Cubbidge, 2010). This study hopes to enhance the understanding of the resources that young, early career graduates employ in order to cope with the unfamiliar demands of the new workplace and, importantly, to indicate what may be done to support and facilitate this transition, minimise anxiety and optimise self-esteem, especially in view of the fact that early career experiences are likely to shape the individual’s future career orientation and work values (Creed et al., 2011; Senior & Cubbidge, 2010). This insight is also a fundamental aspect of bridging the frequent and omnipresent generational gap between those in charge and those just entering the workplace (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008).

In addition, a supportive work environment is likely to facilitate the development and maintenance of positive workplace values and productive work behaviours, reduce individual anxiety and promote creative problem solving (Creed et al., 2011).

It is envisaged that the results of this research study will contribute to an understanding of the essential elements of an effective vocational framework. This vocational framework will provide tailor-made career support for the young entrants specifically, taking into account their life stage, building on the psycho social resources which they access more readily as well as finding ways in which to develop the meta competencies they are likely to access less frequently but which are, nevertheless, still required for effective career development and success (Ackerman & Beier, 2003). The interrelationship between the organisational focus of career management (coupled with the stark demands of the 21st-century career) and the graduate-centred understanding of the resources underpinning employability and mitigating the effects of a potentially stressful period in the lives of new entrants is important. Organisational support for effective individual career choices and commitment is essential for accomplishment that benefits both the new employee and the organisation. On a practical level, during a time of increasing economic constraints, focused career management activities and the optimal utilisation of resources makes business sense and also increases the opportunities to develop and retain successful graduates, who are able to cope with the

demands of an early career (Barnett & Bradley, 2007; Bridgstock, 2009; Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008).

3.1.6 What will follow

A discussion detailing the research design for this study will follow. This includes an explanation of the research approach and the research method used. The research results will be provided, followed by a discussion of the significant findings and an interpretation of these findings in the context of existing research. The conclusion to the study will be discussed and the limitations of the study identified. Lastly, recommendations for future research will be made.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The literature review detailed in Chapter 2 and outlined in the sections above forms the foundation for the research design and methodology used in the study. According to Mouton and Marais (1994), a research design is the planned and structured approach to collecting and analysing data in order both to align the research aims with the practical concerns and constraints of the study and to optimise the utility and validity of the overall research findings. Details of the research approach and method used in the study follow. These will further explain the particular research design used for the purposes of this study.

3.2.1 Research approach

The study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey approach through the use of appropriate measures of the constructs of psychological career resources and coping resources.

3.2.2 Research method

3.2.2.1 Participants

The participants comprised a purposive, non-probability sample of 197 black graduates (African, Indian and Coloured) who were attending a 12-week Thusanani Work Readiness Programme sponsored by the Financial, Accounting, Management Consulting and other Financial Services SETA (FASSET) as part of a broad set of initiatives to promote and support skills development in the sector. The programme aimed to develop general workplace skills such as problem solving, customer care, project management, stress management and time management. On the successful completion of the programme the graduates were assisted in finding permanent employment through a structured process delivered by the lead service provider (http://.fasset.co.za).

The African, Indian and Coloured graduates from all nine provinces of South Africa had responded to an advertisement. They were required to undergo an assessment process in order to be accepted for the programme. In order to be deemed eligible for inclusion on the programme, participants also had to have completed a postgraduate degree, diploma or certificate and be actively engaged in seeking employment. As a result of this entrance requirement, 62.9% of the sample had completed a degree, with the remaining 37.1% having completed certificates and national diplomas. It emerged that 32.5% of respondents had a degree in accounting and IT-related fields. The other areas of study were varied and included administration, banking, business economics, law, management, psychology and public administration. After accounting and IT, the next largest group in the sample comprised those who had completed qualifications in human resources (10.6% of the sample).

The sample was predominantly African (99.5%) with just one Coloured respondent (0.5%). There were no Indian or White participants. Females comprised 53.3% of the sample whilst males comprised 46.7%. The participants ranged in age between 20 and 29, with 85.5% of the participants being in the early career stage (up to aged 25), while 0.5% of the respondents were aged 29.

Of the participants, 50.8% reported having been in part-time employment. It was found that 17.8% of participants had spent the preceding eight months seeking employment, 22.3 % had been seeking employment for the preceding 12 months and 11.2% had been looking for permanent employment for the preceding two years. The longest reported period spent in seeking permanent employment was four years. However, 4.6% of the participants did not specify the period for which they had been involved in seeking employment.

3.2.2.2 Measuring instruments

A biographical questionnaire was drawn up in order to obtain relevant information about the participant sample. The Coping Resources Inventory (CRI) (Marting & Hammer, 1987) and the Psychological Career Resources Inventory (PCRI) (Coetzee, 2007) were used to measure the two variables under investigation.

- Psychological Career Resources Inventory (PCRI)

The PCRI (Coetzee, 2007; 2013) is a self-rated, multi-factorial assessment tool which is used to measure an individual's self-perceived strengths in terms of the five domains of psychological career resources. The PCRI consists of five subscales and 64 items, namely, career preferences (17 items), career values (8 items), career enablers (8 items), career drivers (10 items) and career harmonisers (21 items).

The PCRI measures a total of 15 constructs: stability/expertise; managerial; variety/creativity and freedom/autonomy (career preferences); growth/development and authority/influence (career values); practical/creative skills and self/other skills (career enablers); career purpose; career directedness and career venturing (career drivers) and self-esteem; behavioural adaptability; emotional literacy and social connectivity (career harmonisers).

This measurement tool uses a six-point Likert-type scale to analyse participant responses to each of the PCRI items. Evidence of construct validity is provided by exploratory factor analysis (Coetzee, 2007) and confirmatory factor analysis (Coetzee, 2013). Construct validity, as indicated by the 15-factor model, supports the underlying dimensions of the psychological career resources construct as theorised by Coetzee (2007). Inter-construct correlations ranged from 0.14 to 0.58. In terms of reliability (internal-consistency), Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each subscale ranged from 0.71 to 0.88 (high). Studies conducted by Coetzee (2007; 2013) confirmed the reliability and validity of the PCRI in the South African context.

- Coping Resources Inventory (CRI)

The CRI was chosen for the purposes of this study as it is intended to be used in, among others, a research setting to provide a standardised measure of the coping resources of various populations. In addition, the CRI is designed for use with secondary school scholars, university students and adults. The CRI is a paper-based instrument using a four-point Likert scale to measure the participants' coping resources. There are five individual scale scores and one total score (Zeidner & Hammer, 1990). A high resource score is likely to promote an effective response to a stressor and reduce many of the negative consequences and symptoms of the stressful experience, while low resource scores indicate areas for individual development in order to cope more successfully with stress-inducing events (Marting & Hammer, 1987).

The CRI consists of five subscales and 60 items, namely, the cognitive subscale (9 items), the social subscale (13 items), the emotional subscale (16 items), the spiritual/philosophical subscale (encompasses formal religions, cultural traditions and personal philosophies) (11 items) and the physical sub scale (11 items) (Marting & Hammer, 1987).

Studies on the validity of the CRI appear to support the underlying constructs of the five subscales. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis of the CRI total resource score was found to be a significant incremental predictor of stress symptoms (0.15, $p < 0.0001$). Validity coefficients ranging from 0.61 for the spiritual/philosophical subscale to 0.80 on the physical subscale support divergent validity (Hammer & Marting, 1987).

Reliability was established with Cronbach's alpha coefficients and test-retest reliability ranging from 0.71 on the physical subscale), 0.77 on the cognitive subscale, 0.79 on the social subscale, 0.80 on the spiritual/philosophical subscale to 0.84 on the emotional subscale (Hammer & Marting, 1987).

3.2.2.3 Research procedure

All the graduates who were attending the FASSET Thusanani Work Readiness Programme were invited to participate in the research study in pre-arranged sessions on a voluntary basis during the course of the 12-week programme. No incentives were provided to enhance the response rates. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the lead provider who was in favour of the study. The researcher was a facilitator on the Work Readiness Programme and she coordinated the completion of the questionnaires, both in terms of the logistics and in her capacity as psychometrist. During the group sessions the purpose of the research was explained, the participants signed consent forms, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed and the questionnaires were completed and returned to the researcher. The questionnaires were scored electronically.

3.2.2.4 Statistical analyses

The statistical procedures chosen for the purposes of this study were based on their applicability to the exploratory nature of the research design. The quantitative analysis which was conducted is described below.

The Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS, 2003) was used to compute descriptive, correlational and inferential statistics. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to assess the internal consistency reliability of the constructs measured in the study. With regard to hypothesis 1 – the psychological career resources of individuals relate significantly and positively to their coping resources – Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were used to specify the relationship between the variables. In terms of statistical significance, it was decided to set the value at a 95% confidence interval level ($p \leq 0.05$) and the practical effect size at $r \geq 0.30 \geq 0.50$ (medium to large effect). In addition to correlation analysis, stepwise multiple regression analyses were also carried out to test research hypothesis 2 – the psychological career resources of individuals positively and significantly predict their coping resources.

The F-test was used to test whether there was a significant regression between the independent and the dependent variables. For the purposes of this study, R^2 values larger than 0.13 (moderate practical effect) were regarded as practically significant (Cohen, 1992).

In order to test hypothesis 3 – individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources – independent sample T-tests were performed to determine whether there were any significant differences ($p \leq 0.05$) between the male and female respondents and between those participants who had had previous employment experience and those who had had no previous employment experience.

3.3 RESULTS

This section reviews the descriptive and inferential statistics of significant value for each scale used in the study.

3.3.1 Descriptive statistics

3.3.1.1 Reporting of scale reliability

This section contains the scale reliabilities for the following scales: Psychological Career Resources Inventory (PCRI) and the Coping Resources Inventory (CRI).

- Psychological Career Resources Inventory

Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) argue that Cronbach's alpha coefficient values of between 0.5 and 0.6 are acceptable for basic research purposes although a coefficient of 0.8 and higher is considered to be ideal. It is clear from Table 3.1 that all the PCRI subscales achieved an acceptable level of internal consistency, with the coefficients ranging from moderate (0.51 for Self/Other skills) to high (0.81 for Career Venturing). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each of the main subscales were: Career Preferences = 0.79, Career Harmonisers = 0.84, Career Drivers = 0.67, Career Enablers = 0.71 and Career Values = 0.71.

Table 3.1

Reliability (internal consistency) indices for the PCRI scales

PCRI scales	Cronbach's alpha
Career Preferences	**0.79**
Stability/Expertise	0.60
Managerial	0.67
Variety/Creativity	0.63
Independence/Autonomy	0.63
Career Values	**0.70**
Growth/Development	0.70
Authority/Influence	0.61

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Career Enablers	**0.71**
Practical/Creative skills	0.74
Self/Other skills	0.51
Career Drivers	**0.66**
Career Purpose	0.59
Career Directedness	0.55
Career Venturing	0.81
Career Harmonisers	**0.84**
Self-esteem	0.72
Behavioural adaptability	0.69
Emotional literacy	0.70
Social connectivity	0.64

- Coping Resources Inventory

As indicated in Table 3.2 the Cronbach's alpha values for the CRI were all acceptable (above 0.5). The following individual scale alpha values were obtained: Cognitive = 0.70, Social 0.72, Emotional = 0.75, Spiritual/philosophical = 0.66 and Physical = 0.59.

Table 3.2

Reliability (internal consistency) indices for the CRI scales

Scales	**Cronbach's alpha**
Cognitive	0.70
Social	0.72
Emotional	0.75
Spiritual/Philosophical	0.66
Physical	0.59

3.3.1.2 Descriptive Statistics: PCRI and CRI

Descriptive statistics were computed for the PCRI and CRI variables. Table 3.3 presents the means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum scores obtained. The PCRI Career Purpose variable obtained the highest mean score (M = 5.63; SD = 0.44). Other high scoring PRCI variables included: Career Harmonisers construct of Self-esteem (M = 5.48; SD = 0.53); Career Value of Growth/Development (M = 5.45; SD = 0.56); Career Preference for Stability/Expertise (M = 5.40; SD = 0.41); Career Enablers construct of Self/Other skills (M = 5.25; SD = 0.59); Career Harmonisers construct of Social Connectivity (M = 5.22; SD = 0.71) as well as the subscale Career Harmonisers (M = 5.02; SD = 0.54).

The respondents scored the lowest on the Career Preference for Independence/Autonomy (M = 3.99; SD = 0.99). Other relatively low mean scores included Career Venturing (M = 4.15; SD = 1.38), Career Value of Authority/Influence (M= 4.16; SD = 0.99) and the Career Drivers construct of Career Directedness (M = 4.19; SD = 0.88).

Table 3.3

Descriptive statistics: PCRI and CRI (n=197)

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
PCRI				
Career Preferences	3.24	5.94	4.82	0.56
Career Values	3.13	6	4.96	0.59
Career Enablers	2.63	6	4.86	0.63
Career Drivers	3.40	6	4.90	0.53
Career Harmonisers	3.43	5.95	5.02	0.54
Stability/Expertise	3.33	6	5.40	0.51
Managerial	2.25	6	4.68	0.89
Variety/Creativity	2.33	6	4.92	0.90
Independence/Autonomy	1.25	6	3.99	0.99
Growth/Development	3.80	6	5.45	0.56
Authority/Influence	1.00	6	4.16	0.99
Practical/Creative Skills	1.75	6	4.46	0.94
Self/Other Skills	3.25	6	5.25	0.59
Career Purpose	3.75	6	5.63	0.44
Career Directedness	1.33	6	4.19	0.88
Career Venturing	1.00	6	4.15	1.38
Self-esteem	3.43	6	5.48	0.53
Behavioural Adaptability	3.00	6	4.84	0.76
Emotional Literacy	1.20	6	4.48	0.95
Social Connectivity	2.50	6	5.22	0.71
CRI				
Cognitive	2.22	4.00	3.62	0.35
Social	1.92	4.00	3.28	0.41
Emotional	1.93	4.56	3.08	0.49
Spiritual	1.82	4.00	3.24	0.42
Physical	1.73	3.64	2.80	0.39

In terms of coping resources, the highest scoring CRI dimension was Cognitive (M = 3.62; SD = 0.35) with Social (M = 3.28; SD = 0.41), Spiritual (M = 3.24; SD = 0.42) and Emotional

(M = 3.08; SD = 0.49) showing fairly similar scores. The participants obtained low mean scores on the Physical subscale (M = 2.80; SD = 0.39).

3.3.2 Correlational statistics

3.3.2.1 Pearson product-moment correlation analyses: Psychological career resources and coping resources

In order to test research hypothesis 1 – The psychological career resources of individuals relate significantly and positively to their coping resources –, correlations between the variables of the PCRI and CRI were computed. The correlations are presented in Table 3.4 below.

Table 3.4

Correlations between psychological career resources and coping resources

Psychological Career Resources		Coping Resources				
		Cognitive	Social	Emotional	Spiritual/ Philosophical	Physical
Stability/Expertise	Pearson *r*	.41	.24	.28	.27	0.05
	p-value	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.51
Managerial	Pearson *r*	.29	.28	.23	.20	-0.05
	p-value	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.51
Variety/ Creativity	Pearson *r*	.23	.22	.17	.29	0.01
	p-value	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.93
Independence/ Autonomy	Pearson *r*	.16	0.09	0.08	0.06	-0.03
	p-value	0.03	0.19	0.29	0.38	0.67
Growth/Development	Pearson *r*	.34	.42	.29	.23	.17
	p-value	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.02
Authority/Influence	Pearson *r*	.21	.21	.21	0.12	-0.01
	p-value	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.09	0.90
Practical/ Creative skills	Pearson *r*	.36	.38	.28	.22	.15
	p-value	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.04
Self/ Other skills	Pearson *r*	.47	.45	.42	.52	0.12
	p-value	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.09
Career Purpose	Pearson *r*	.29	.37	.32	.26	0.02
	p-value	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.81
Career Directedness	Pearson *r*	.37	.35	.33	.30	.21
	p-value	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Career Venturing	Pearson *r*	0.12	.24	.25	.16	-0.00
	p-value	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.96
Self-esteem	Pearson *r*	.63	.54	.46	.39	.27
	p-value	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Behavioural adaptability	Pearson *r*	.45	.60	.49	.54	.22
	p-value	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Emotional literacy	Pearson *r*	.39	.51	.71	.32	0.03
	p-value	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.72

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Social connectivity	Pearson *r*	.44	.65	.50	.35	.21
	p-value	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Table 3.4 shows that the PCRI variables correlated positively with the CRI variables. Four of the five coping resources (Cognitive, Social, Emotional and Spiritual/Philosophical) correlated significantly and positively with most of the PCRI variables.

Cognitive coping showed the strongest correlation with the Career Harmoniser construct of Self-esteem (r = 0.63, p = 0.000, large practical effect). Some of the other larger medium effect correlations included: Career Enablers construct of Self/Other skills (r = 0.47, p = 0.000, medium practical effect), Career Harmonisers constructs of Behavioural Adaptability (r = 0.45, p = 0.000, medium practical effect) and Social Stability (r = 0.44, p = 0.000, medium practical effect) and Career Preference for Stability/Expertise (r = .42, p = 0.000, medium practical effect). In fact, so many of the Coping Resources correlated strongly with PRCI that it was deemed to be more enlightening to highlight the dimensions which showed either no or poor correlations, namely, Career Preference for Independence/Autonomy (r = 0.16, p = 0.029, small practical effect) and Career Venturing (r = 0.12, p = 0.09, small practical effect). While the correlation between the cognitive coping resource and the career value of Independence/Autonomy was small, it is the only coping resource that showed any significant correlation with this career value.

Whilst the Social Coping Resource showed slightly fewer correlations overall than Cognitive Coping it did, however, show very strong correlations (large practical effect) with the Career Harmonisers constructs of Social Stability (r = 0.65, p = 0.000, large practical effect), Self-esteem (r = 0.54, p = 0.000, large practical effect), Behavioural Adaptability (r = 0.60, p = 0.000, large practical effect) and Emotional Literacy (r = 0.51, p = 0.000, large practical effect). Some of the larger of the medium practical effect size correlations with Social Coping included the Career Value of Growth/Development (r = .42, p = 0.000, medium practical effect) and the Career Enablers of Self/Other skills (r = 0.45, p = 0.000, medium practical effect).

Emotional Coping showed a very strong correlation with the Career Harmonisers construct of Emotional Literacy (r = 0.71, p = 0.000, large practical effect). This coping dimension also showed various other medium practical effect size correlations of which the largest included the Career Enablers construct of Self/Other skills (r = 0.42, p = 0.000, medium practical effect) and the Career Harmonisers constructs of Self-esteem (r = 0.46, p = 0.000 medium practical effect), Behavioural Adaptability (r = 0.49, p = 0.000, medium practical effect) and Social Connectivity (r = 0.50, p = 0.000 medium practical effect).

The Spiritual/Philosophical Coping Resource showed a strong correlation with the Career Enabler dimension of Self/other (r = 0.52, p = 0.000, large practical effect) and the Career Harmoniser constructs of Behavioural Adaptability (r = 0.54, p = 0.000, large practical effect). Medium practical effect correlations were seen with the Career Harmoniser construct of Self-esteem (r = 0.39, p = 0.000); Emotional Literacy (r = 0.32, p = 0.000) and Social Connectivity (r = 0.35, p = 0.000).

Physical Coping showed positive correlations with a few of the PRCI variables only, with the strongest correlation being with the Career Harmoniser construct of Self-esteem (r = 0.27; p = 0.000; small practical effect).

Table 3.4 shows that the zero-order correlations were all well below the level of multi-collinearity concerns ($r \geq .80$) as per the guidelines of Field (2009). The correlation results provided an initial indication that further analyses in the form of stepwise multiple regression analyses to assess the ability of the PCRI variables to predict the CRI variables were warranted.

The correlation analyses provided supportive evidence for research hypothesis 1 – The psychological career resources of individuals relate significantly and positively to their coping resources.

3.3.3 Inferential Statistics: multiple regression analyses

In order to test hypothesis 2 – The psychological career resources of individuals positively and significantly predict their coping resources – stepwise multiple regression analyses were performed.

Five separate, simple, stepwise multiple regression models were computed to predict coping resources (dependent variables: cognitive, social, emotional, spiritual and physical) from the five psychological career resources dimensions (independent variables: career preferences, career values, career enablers, career drivers and career harmonisers). A stepwise regression analysis computes multiple models, each time adding more significant variables to the model with the aim of finding the best model with the least amount of predictor variables. Table 3.5 presents the significant results for each of the five models which yielded the best R^2 values.

Table 3.5 also presents the collinearity statistics (variance inflation factor (VIF) and the tolerance score). Although there is no formal benchmark against which to measure the VIF value for determining the presence of multicollinearity, Field (2009) suggests that VIF values exceeding 10 should be regarded as indicators of multicollinearity. This study yielded VIF

values of 1 and below and it was, therefore, concluded that multicollinearity was not a particular concern in the study. The beta weights could, therefore, be interpreted with greater confidence.

3.3.3.1 Psychological career resources as a predictor of cognitive coping

Model 1, depicted in shown in Table 3.5, assessed which of the psychological resources contributed the most in explaining the variance in the CRI cognitive coping variable. Model 1 explains 43% (R^2 = .43; F$p \leq .05$; large practical effect) of the variance in cognitive coping while the career harmonisers dimension (β = .52; $p \leq .001$) and career enablers dimension (β = .22; $p \leq .001$), contributed positively and significantly in explaining the variance in cognitive coping.

3.3.3.2 Psychological career resources as a predictor of social coping

Model 2 (Table 3.5) assessed which of the five PCRI dimension variables contributed the most in explaining the variance in the CRI social coping variable. Model 2 explains 55% (R^2 = .55; F$p \leq .05$; large practical effect) of the variance in social coping while, similar to model 1, the career harmonisers dimension (β = .74; $p \leq .001$) contributed the most in explaining the variance in social coping.

3.3.3.3 Psychological career resources as a predictor of emotional coping

Model 3 (Table 3.5) assessed which of the five PCRI dimension variables contributed the most in explaining the variance in the CRI emotional coping variable. Model 3 explains 53% (R^2 = .53; F$p \leq .05$; large practical effect) of the variance in emotional coping while, similar to models 1 and 2, the career harmonisers dimension (β = .73; $p \leq .001$) contributed the most in explaining the variance in emotional coping.

3.3.3.4 Psychological career resources as a predictor of spiritual/philosophical coping

Model 4 (Table 3.5) assessed which of the five PCRI dimension variables contributed the most in explaining the variance in the CRI spiritual/philosophical coping variable. Model 4 explained 31% (R^2 = .31; F$p \leq .05$; large practical effect) of the variance in spiritual coping while, similar to model 1, the career harmonisers dimension (β = .45; $p \leq .001$) and career enablers dimension (β = .18; $p \leq .01$), contributed the most in explaining the variance in spiritual/philosophical coping.

3.3.3.5 Psychological career resources as a predictor of physical coping

Model 5 (Table 3.5) assessed which of the five PCRI dimension variables contributed the most in explaining the variance in the CRI physical coping variable. Model 5 explains 13% (R^2 = .13; F$p \leq .05$; moderate practical effect) of the variance in physical coping while, similar

to the previous models, the career harmonisers dimension (β = .36; $p \leq .001$) contributed the most in explaining the variance in physical coping.

Table 3.5

Multiple regression analyses: Coping resources as the dependent variable and PCRI as independent variables (N=197).

Variables	Unstandardised coefficient		Standardised coefficient			Adjusted		R	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	SE B	B	t	P	F	R square		Tolerance	VIF
Model 1: Cognitive						73.5	.43	.43		
(Constant)	1.38	.19								
Career Harmonisers	.33	.04	.52	8.11	.00***				.73	1.38
Career Enablers	.12	.04	.22	3.45	.00**				.73	1.38
Model 2: Social						237	.55	.55		
(Constant)	.48	.18		2.60	.01*					
Career Harmonisers	.56	.04	.74	15.40	.00***				1.00	1.00
Model 3: Emotional						219.8	.53	.53		
(Constant)	-.22	.22		-0.99	.33					
Career Harmonisers	.66	.04	.73	14.83	.00***				1.00	1.00
Model 4: Spiritual/philosophical						44.73	.31	.32		
(Constant)	.95	.24		3.88	.00***					
Career Harmonisers	.12	.05	.45	6.41	.00***				0.73	1.38
Career Enablers	.34	.05	.18	2.58	.01*				0.73	1.38
Model 5: Physical coping						29	.13††	.130		
(Constant)	1.49	.24		6.08	.00***					
Career Harmonisers	.261	.05	0.36	5.40	.00***				1.00	1.00

***$p < 0.001$ **$p < 0.01$ **$p < 0.05$

The multiple regression analyses provided supportive evidence for research hypothesis 2 – The psychological career resources of individuals positively and significantly predict their coping resources.

3.3.4 Inferential statistics: tests for significant mean differences

In order to test research hypothesis 3 – Individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources – tests for significant means differences were performed. Employment status refers to both part-time work experience and no work experience.

3.3.4.1 Significant mean difference: gender

The t-test results in Table 3.6 show that the men and women differed significantly on Emotional Coping (M male = 2.95; M female = 3.63, p = 0.000), Spiritual Coping (M male = 3.17; M female = 3.29, p = 0.04) and Physical coping (M male = 2.89; M female = 2.71, p = 0.001). The female participants scored significantly higher than the males on emotional coping and spiritual coping while the males scored significantly higher on physical coping.

In terms of the PCRI variables, significant differences existed in terms of Career Drivers (M male = 4.82; M female = 4.98, p = 0.03, Career Harmonisers (M male = 4.94; M female = 5.09, p = 0.04), the Career Harmoniser constructs of Emotional Literacy (M male = 4.30; M female = 4.63, p = 0.02 and Social Connectivity (M male = 5.11; M female = 5.31, p = 0.01). The female participants scored significantly higher than the males on the career drivers, career harmonisers, emotional literacy and social connectivity variables.

Table 3.6

Significant mean differences between gender groups: Independent t-test results (males n = 100; females n = 96)

	Group	Mean	SD	T	df	Sig
Coping resources						
Cognitive	Male	3.62	0.36	-0.12	195	.91
	Female	3.63	0.34			
Social	Male	3.24	0.42	-1.01	195	.32
	Female	3.30	0.40			
Emotional	Male	2.95	0.50	-3.70	195	.00***
	Female	3.20	0.45			
Spiritual/philosophical	Male	3.17	0.43	-2.06	195	.04*
	Female	3.29	0.40			
Physical	Male	2.89	0.39	3.24	195	.00**
	Female	2.71	0.38			
PCRI						
Career preferences	Male	4.79	0.56	-0.73	195	.47
	Female	4.84	0.56			
Career values	Male	4.96	0.61	-0.17	195	.87
	Female	4.97	0.58			
Career enablers	Male	4.85	0.66	-0.16	195	.87
	Female	4.86	0.60			
Career drivers	Male	4.82	0.53	-2.17	195	.03*
	Female	4.98	0.52			
Career harmonisers	Male	4.94	0.55	-2.06	195	.04*
	Female	5.09	0.52			

Stability/expertise	Male	5.39	0.54	-0.33	194	.74
	Female	5.42	0.49			
Managerial	Male	4.64	0.85	-0.63	195	.53
	Female	4.72	0.92			
Creativity/variety	Male	4.84	0.83	-1.14	195	.25
	Female	4.98	0.96			
Autonomy/independence	Male	3.97	1.00	-0.27	195	.79
	Female	4.01	0.98			
Growth and development	Male	5.45	0.56	0.02	195	.98
	Female	5.45	0.56			
Authority and influence	Male	4.13	1.02	-0.33	195	.74
	Female	4.18	0.98			
Practical/creative skills	Male	4.52	0.96	0.83	195	.41
	Female	4.40	0.93			
Self/other skills	Male	5.18	0.64	-1.66	195	.10
	Female	5.32	0.53			
Career purpose	Male	5.57	0.51	-1.71	195	.09
	Female	5.68	0.37			
Career directedness	Male	4.11	0.87	-1.23	195	.22
	Female	4.26	0.88			
Career venturing	Male	3.97	1.31	-1.71	194	.09
	Female	4.31	1.43			
Self esteem	Male	5.46	0.54	-0.39	190	.70
	Female	5.49	0.52			
Behavioural adaptability	Male	4.76	0.79	-1.47	195	.14
	Female	4.91	0.73			
Emotional literacy	Male	4.30	1.03	-2.38	177	.02*
	Female	4.63	0.85			
Social connectivity	Male	5.11	0.73	-1.99	195	.05*
	Female	5.31	0.67			

***$p < 0.001$ **$p < 0.01$ *$p < 0.05$

The tests for significant mean differences (gender) provided supportive evidence for part of research hypothesis 3 – Individuals from different gender groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources

3.3.4.2 Significant mean differences: employment status

The differences in the mean scores for coping resources and psychological career resources were also examined for those respondents who had had some experience of part time work and those who had not. The results, presented in Table 3.7, indicate that there were no

significant differences between coping resources and two significant differences only in terms of psychological career resources. In terms of the career driver construct of career venturing those with some work experience scored significantly higher than those without part-time employment (M = 4.3 vs. M = 3.94, p = 0.03. In terms of the career harmoniser construct of behavioural adaptability, the respondents with some work experience scored significantly higher (M = 4.99 vs. M = 4.69, p = 0.01) than their counterparts with no part time work exposure.

The tests for significant mean differences (employment status) provide supportive evidence for part of research hypothesis H3 – Individuals from different employment status groups significantly differ in terms of their psychological career resources.

Table 3.7

Significant mean differences between employment groups: Independent t-test results (Yes, have part time experience n = 100; No, do not have part time experience n = 96)

	Group	Mean	SD	T	df	Sig
Coping resources						
Cognitive	Yes	3.64	0.34	.39	194	.70
	No	3.62	0.35			
Social	Yes	3.30	0.41	.85	194	.39
	No	3.25	0.41			
Emotional	Yes	3.10	0.50	.52	194	.60
	No	3.06	0.49			
Spiritual/philosophical	Yes	3.28	0.43	1.51	194	.13
	No	3.19	0.39			
Physical	Yes	2.80	0.41	.20	194	.85
	No	2.79	0.38			
PCRI						
Career preferences	Yes	4.86	0.58	.87	194	.39
	No	4.79	0.53			
Career values	Yes	4.97	0.63	.20	194	.84
	No	4.96	0.55			
Career enablers	Yes	4.90	0.59	1.00	194	.32
	No	4.82	0.66			
Career drivers	Yes	4.93	0.54	0.55	194	.58
	No	4.89	0.51			
Career harmonisers	Yes	5.07	0.55	1.27	194	.21
	No	4.97	0.53			
Stability/expertise	Yes	5.42	0.55	0.35	193	.73
	No	5.40	0.46			

Managerial	Yes	4.75	0.88	1.02	194	.31
	No	4.62	0.89			
Creativity/variety	Yes	4.98	0.91	0.87	194	.39
	No	4.86	0.89			
Autonomy/independence	Yes	4.01	1.03	0.17	194	.87
	No	3.98	0.95			
Growth and development	Yes	5.44	0.56	-0.27	194	.79
	No	5.46	0.56			
Authority and influence	Yes	4.21	1.03	0.60	194	.55
	No	4.12	0.95			
Practical/creative skills	Yes	4.50	0.91	0.69	194	.49
	No	4.41	0.98			
Self/other skills	Yes	5.30	0.57	0.90	194	.37
	No	5.22	0.59			
Career purpose	Yes	5.60	0.51	-1.07	194	.29
	No	5.66	0.36			
Career directedness	Yes	4.17	0.89	-0.41	194	.68
	No	4.22	0.88			
Career venturing	Yes	4.37	1.38	2.20	193	.03
	No	3.94	1.36			
Self esteem	Yes	5.50	0.55	0.62	194	.53
	No	5.45	0.51			
Behavioural adaptability	Yes	4.99	0.73	2.76	194	.01
	No	4.69	0.75			
Emotional literacy	Yes	4.47	0.99	-0.28	194	.78
	No	4.50	0.89			
Social connectivity	Yes	5.25	0.69	0.52	194	.61
	No	5.20	0.72			

3.3.5 Integration: relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources

Four of the five coping resources (cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual/philosophical) show medium to strong correlations with many of the psychological career resources. Figures 3.1 to 3.4 below indicate graphically where the strongest correlations are between the PCRI dimensions and four of the five coping resources only. Although there are a large number of significant correlations, only those with a medium to large practical effect size are depicted in the figures below. As a result, the correlations between PCRI and the physical coping resource, which show a small practical effect only, have not been graphically depicted. A **pink line** indicates a medium practical effect between the concepts while a **blue**

line indicates a large practical effect. Managerial, variety/creativity, authority/influence and career venturing do not show any medium to large correlations with any coping resource and, in the interests of simplicity, was excluded from the diagrams.

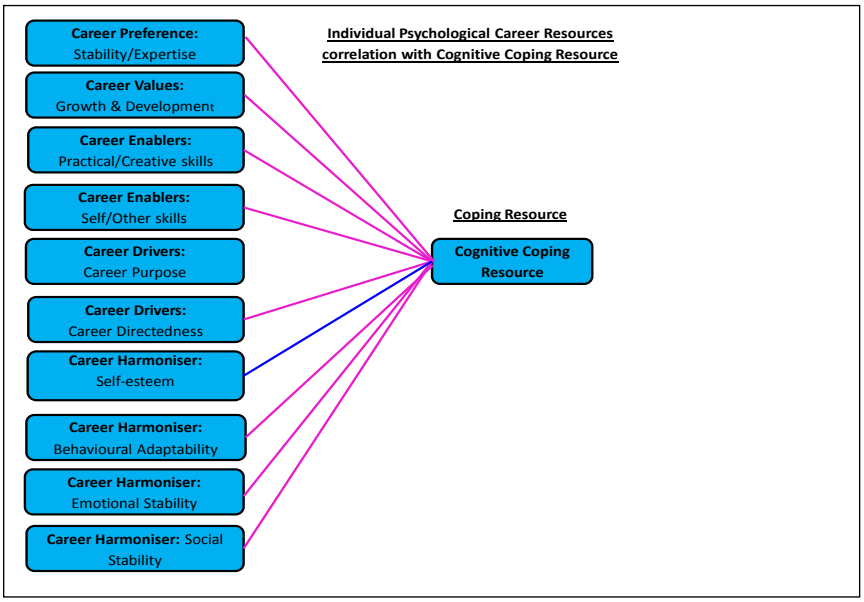

Figure 3.2: Relationship between PRCI dimensions and cognitive coping resource

Figure 3.2 indicates that the cognitive coping resource shows a strong correlation with the career harmoniser construct of self-esteem and medium correlations with the career preference for stability/expertise, the career value of growth/development, the career enablers constructs of practical/creative skills and self/other skills, the career drivers construct of career directedness and the career harmonisers constructs of behavioural adaptability, emotional stability and social stability.

Figure 3.3 shows the medium and large correlations between PCRI and social coping. Social coping correlates very strongly with all of the career harmoniser PCRI dimensions.

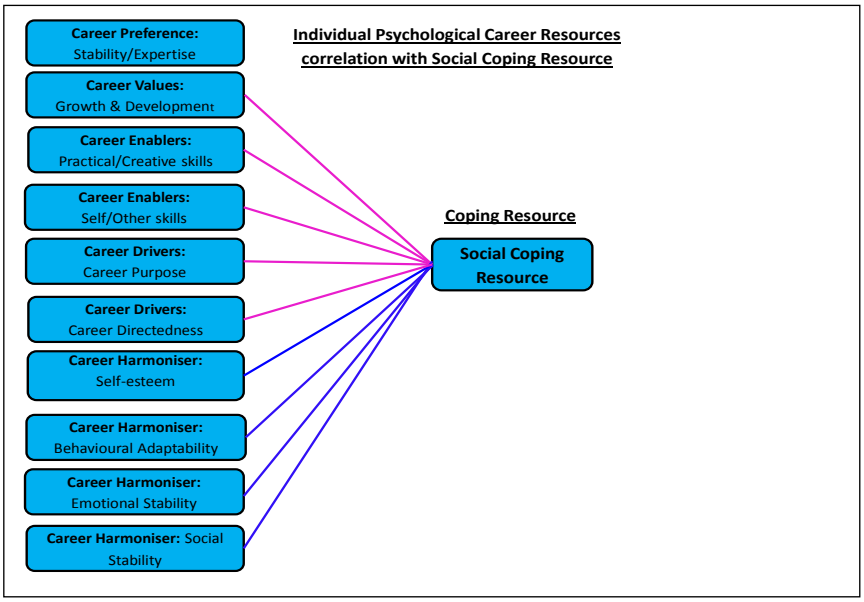

Figure 3.3: Relationship between PRCI dimensions and social coping resource

The links between the PRCI dimensions and emotional coping are depicted in Figure 3.4. There is one correlation only with a large practical effect, namely, with the career harmoniser construct of emotional stability. Other medium correlations exist with the career harmoniser constructs of self-esteem, behavioural adaptability and social stability while further medium

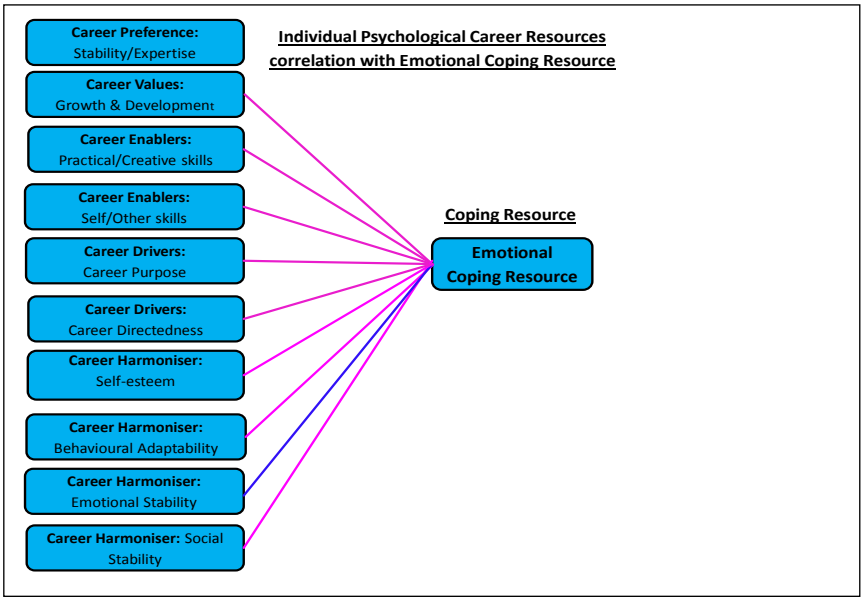

Figure 3.4: Relationship between PRCI dimensions and Emotional coping resource

correlations exist with the career value of growth and development, the career enablers of practical/creative skills and self/other skills. The career driver constructs of career purpose and career directedness also show medium correlations with the emotional coping resource.

Figure 3.5 shows the relationships between the PRCI dimensions and spiritual/philosophical coping. There is a strong link between this coping resource and the career enabler construct of self/other as well as the career harmoniser construct of behavioural adaptability. In addition, there are medium correlations for the career driver construct of career directedness and the career harmonisers of self-esteem, emotional stability and social stability.

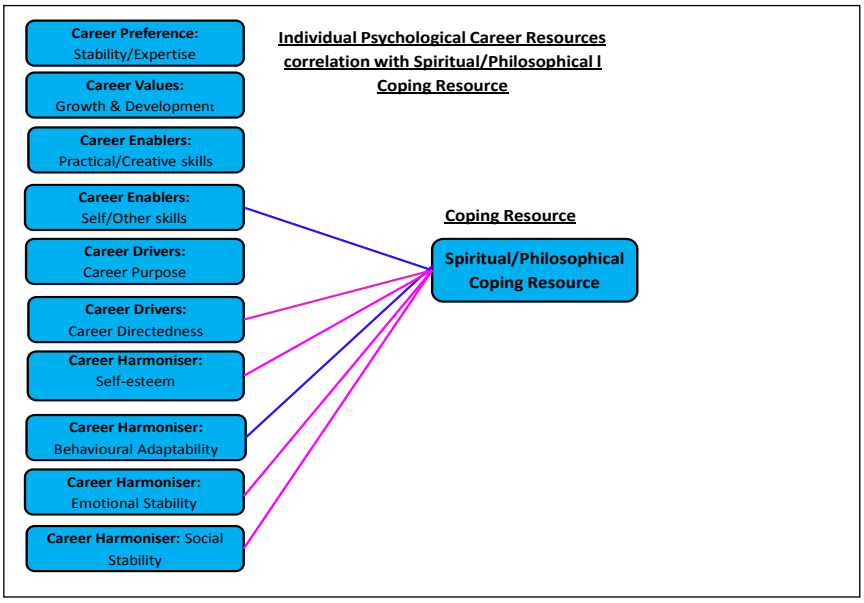

Figure 3.5: Relationship between PRCI dimensions and Spiritual/Philosophical coping resource

As illustrated in Figure 3.6 the emotional coping, spiritual coping and physical coping levels

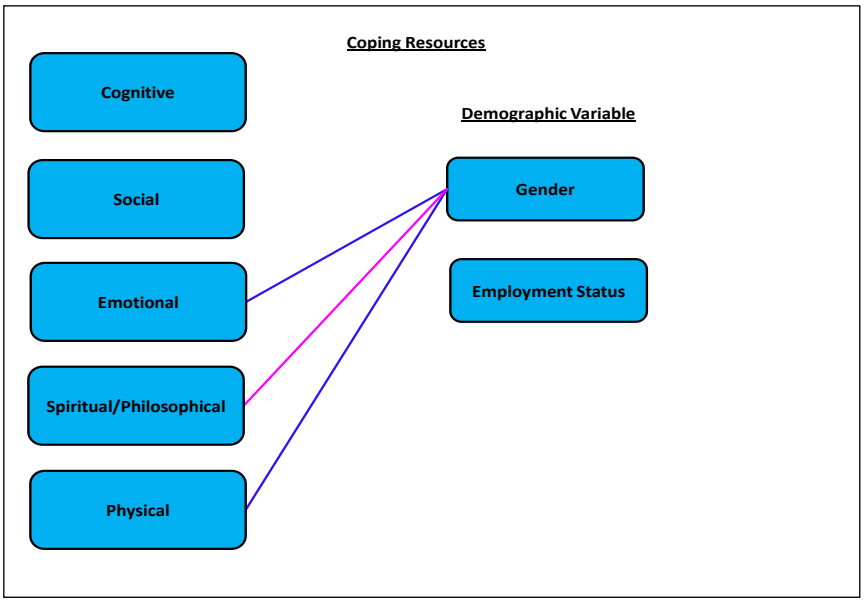

Figure 3.6: Significant differences between Coping Resources, Gender and Employment groups

differed significantly in relation to gender although there is no difference in any of the coping resources scores in terms of employment status (i.e. exposure to part-time employment).

In terms of the PCRI main dimension, Figure 3.7 shows the relationship with gender and employment status. The figure shows that career drivers and career harmonisers only show any differences between men and women while none of the dimensions show any relationship with employment status.

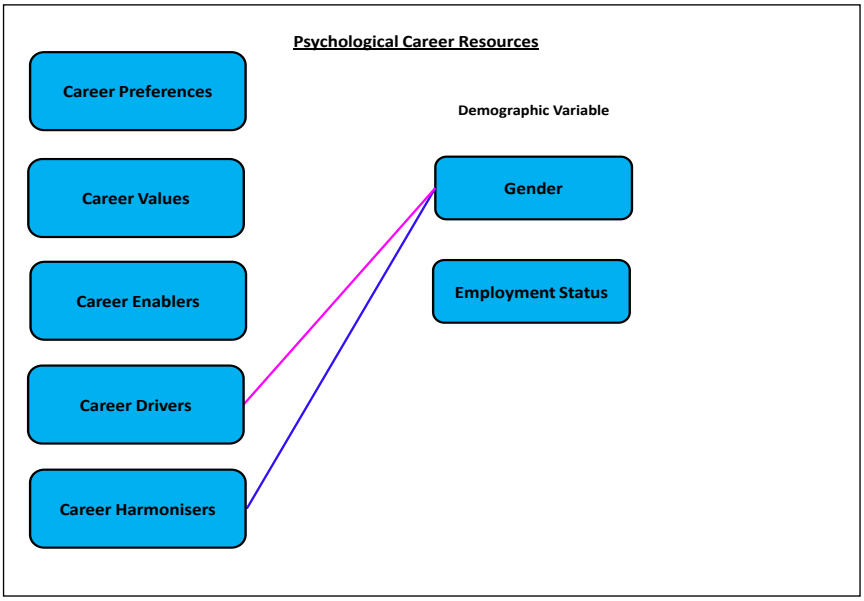

Figure 3.7: Significant differences between Psychological Career Resources, Gender and Employment groups

3.3.6 Decisions regarding the research hypotheses

The central hypothesis of this investigation was formulated as follows:

There is a relationship between the coping resources and psychological career resources of young, early career, South African graduates while gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources.

The **specific research hypotheses** are as follows:

Table 3.8

Research hypotheses

Research aim	Research hypothesis	Supportive evidence
Research aim 1: To explore the nature of the statistical relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources as found in a sample of young, early career, South African graduates in the school-to-work transition phase of their lives.	**Research hypothesis 1**: The psychological career resources of individuals significantly and positively relate to their coping resources.	**Yes**
Research aim 2: To explore whether psychological career resources positively and significantly predict the coping resources of individuals.	**Research hypothesis 2:** The psychological career resources of individuals positively and significantly predict their coping resources.	**Yes**
Research aim 3: To assess whether individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources.	**Research hypothesis 3:** Individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources.	**Yes: (gender)** **Yes (employment status – PCRI)** **No (employment status – CR)**

3.4 Discussion

The aims of this study were to explore the nature of the empirical relationship between coping resources and psychological career resources and to assess whether psychological career resources positively and significantly predict the coping resources of individuals. The study further aimed to assess whether individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources.

3.4.1 The biographical profile of the sample

The sample consisted of 197 unemployed young, early career, black graduates, predominately African, and aged between 20 and 29 years old. Females comprised 53.3% of the sample with 46.7% being males. Almost two thirds of the participants had completed degrees while the others had completed either certificates or national diplomas. Accounting and IT related degrees were in the majority, followed by qualifications in Human Resources. Approximately half of the sample had reported that they had had some previous part-time employment experience. The sample was fairly evenly split between people who had been seeking work for a year or less, and those who had been seeking work for more than a year. The latter is considered to constitute long-term unemployment (Koen et al., 2012).

A sense of coherence and the resultant belief in the ability to cope with daily stressors (Heiman, 2004) are likely to be evidenced by the respondents achieving high cognitive coping resource scores. This, in turn, suggests the capacity to remain positive about both the self and others during times of stress and to remain generally optimistic about life, despite its setbacks and disappointments (Hammer & Marting, 1987). This result is interesting in view of the length of time many participants had actively been seeking employment. It would, thus, appear that the employment seeking process had not damaged the participants' hope and confidence about the future despite the stressful consequences of unemployment. This is consistent with the findings of Koen et al. (2012) in their employability study of the long term unemployed.

The participants' social coping resource scores and spiritual/philosophical coping resources suggested a reliance on broader social networks for support during times of stress and also that they were likely to experience the buffering effects of consistent values derived from inner beliefs, religious practices and philosophical views grounded in culture and tradition (Hammer & Marting, 1987). Heiman (2004) and Krok (2008) found that young people under the age of 27 had drawn on support from family and friends more frequently than the older participants in their studies. It is likely that, given the length of time that participants had been unemployed, some had been forced to draw on familial and community backing in order to survive the financial impact of being without work, as well as seek out a deeper meaning for the hardship associated with trying to find employment. The impact of a collectivist cultural orientation was not in the ambit of this study and, therefore, it was not empirically tested. However, this remains an important area which warrants further investigation.

In this sample low scores on the emotional coping resource and physical coping resource scales indicated less reliance on the expression of emotion and the use of health promoting behaviours (e.g. exercise) to manage the negative consequences of stress (Hammer & Marting, 1987). A balanced coping resources profile is preferable, while differences in profiles provide important information about possible vulnerability to specific stressors (Lin & Ensel, 1989). The presence of these low scores may have had an impact on the overall coping flexibility of the group, while the ability to access the appropriate resource, based on the unique demands of the stressor, is likely to be compromised (Chen, 2003). This result is slightly inconsistent with other research conducted on young people aged 20 to 27 as these studies revealed a dependence on emotion based coping (Heiman, 2004; Krok, 2008).

The participants scored the highest on the career drivers construct of career purpose, suggesting optimism about the future, a strong career calling and inner confidence that career goals are achievable. Although not empirically tested, it is possible that their selection

to attend the Work Readiness Programme, after undergoing a rigorous selection process, and then participating in the course, may have contributed to the overall hopefulness manifested by the participants (Coetzee & Esterhuizen, 2010). This result is consistent with Coetzee's (2009) findings in a study on working adults who had registered for higher education through a tertiary, distance learning institution.

High scores were also obtained on the career harmonisers, thus indicating the presence of career flexibility and resilience as well as the balancing effects of the self-regulation which is essential for the prevention of burn out in the pursuit of career goals (Coetzee, 2013). In particular, these participants would tend to use their sense of self-worth (self-esteem) and accompanying motivation, as well as an ability to make social connections, to advance their career objectives – social connectivity which includes opportunities for growth and development and exposure to stable and predictable occupations in which skills may be honed. These results are consistent with the early career phase during which experience and the development of expertise are crucial for both career advancement and the establishment of a firm life base from which other life roles may emerge (Coetzee & Esterhuizen, 2010; Ferreira et al., 2010). This result is also consistent with Bandura's (2006) view that individuals who develop their competencies, meta-cognition and the accompanying ability to be mindful of and self-regulate behaviour as well as manifesting a belief in their inherent capacity to succeed, are more likely to flourish in expanding their range of opportunities and freedom of action as compared to those who adopt a less proactive and responsible approach to making life choices, viewing their environment as something that acts on them rather than appreciating the influence they have on their environment. An appreciation of one's inherent agentic resources is fundamental for well-being, motivation, resilience, career adaptation, career exploration and career construction in the 21st century (Savickas & Porfeli (2012).

The presence of high self-esteem scores is likely to support overall employability, promote proactive career behaviour and influence career management activities (Potgieter, 2012). Self-esteem is an important career meta-competency which is explored below in the discussion on the relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources.

The low psychological career resources scores of the participants in this study suggest a need to cultivate a willingness to take risks and experiment with potential careers as well as develop a clear career direction and understanding of where to access appropriate career counselling, support and information (Coetzee, 2013). Although not empirically tested, it would appear from anecdotal discussions with many of the participants on the programme

that career choices are often motivated by access to financial support for further studies (e.g. bursaries) or suggestions by family members that a particular career is lucrative and should, therefore, be pursued, rather than a well developed career consciousness directing career choices. This is an area for further research and is likely to yield important information about the early career issues facing young, early career, South African graduates.

The presence of low scores for the career preference construct of independence/autonomy and the career value of authority/influence suggests that a focus on self-directed work opportunities was not a priority for the young graduates in this study. The presence of high and low scores on the career preferences and career values scales contributes to a well differentiated profile which is likely to support subjective career well-being, career adaptability, objective career success and a greater commitment of resources to career related actions (Coetzee, 2013; Coetzee & Schreuder, 2012).

These scores suggest that career preferences would support a strong career calling, inner confidence and general optimism about the potential to realise career objectives whilst being of service to the broader community (Coetzee, 2013). However, the results raised concerns that both career exploration and employability are likely to be undermined by a reduced clarity about a future career direction, insufficient knowledge about where to access relevant career information and an underdeveloped capacity to take intentional risks and experiment with new career opportunities during the career construction process. Although not empirically tested it is possible that obtaining any form of employment is the primary motivator for the young graduate in order to ease the financial pressure of sustained periods of unemployment. In addition, there is also likely to be an inherent reluctance to jeopardise stable employment opportunities in order to explore possible work opportunities that may not materialise. The initial choice of a career may, in the absence of appropriate career guidance activities at the school level, have less to do with the conscious selection of a career and, instead, be guided predominantly by familial and peer influences as well as perceptions about lucrative career choices (Stumpf & Niebuhr, 2012).

The presence of relatively strong career harmonisers and career enablers suggest that many of the resources required to support career adaptability were in place, notably well-developed self-esteem, general optimism, self-regulation and the ability to engage with others in order to build supportive relationships to achieve career objectives (Maggiori et al., 2013; McIlveen, Beccaria & Burton, 2013). It also emerged from sample that the career curiosity of the participants may be compromised by the low career venturing scores, thus resulting in low levels of openness to and interest in new work experiences (Savickas, 2005).

3.4.2 The relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources

The aim of this study was to test empirically the existence of a relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources. This was based on the premise that psychological career resources, in their function as meta-competencies, have the potential to help mitigate the negative effects of stress during the school-to-work transition phase of the young, early career, person's life. It is important to note that psychological career resources may be developed in the career counselling setting and this further highlights the importance of establishing a relationship between the two variables. Based on this reasoning, this study investigated the relationship between the psychological career resources and the coping resources of a sample of young, early career, unemployed African graduates.

Overall, the results, as illustrated in Figure 3.8, indicated that the psychological career resource dimensions contributed significantly and positively to the variances in the coping resources scores of the participants. The Career Harmoniser construct of self-esteem was shown to make a strong positive contribution to explaining the proportion of variance across all five of the coping resource scales. This indicates that feelings of being capable, significant and worthy of career success in relation to others (Coetzee, 2013) make a significant contribution to overall well-being. This also promotes coping flexibility in order to access the full spectrum of resources available to assist the individual in defining the stressor, assess his/her ability to cope with the stressor and then select the best approach to managing the stressor (Cheng, 2003). This is consistent with the findings of Coetzee and Schreuder (2012), which empirically linked self-esteem to increased general life satisfaction, happiness and the need to engage in problem solving in a competitive and challenging way. In addition, self-esteem has been linked to an individual's sense of coherence which is, in turn, underpinned by self-belief in an inherent capacity to cope with challenges and difficulties with confidence, purpose and optimism (Heiman, 2004).

Behavioural adaptability is also considered significant in the relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources. The findings indicated that it contributed positively to variances in all five of the coping resources, although with a small practical effect size as regards the physical coping resource. It would appear that the ability to engage in proactive career behaviour, initiate effort, navigate transitions, take responsibility for career actions and display resilience after personal setbacks (Coetzee, 2013) enhance the cognitive-behavioural resources platform which is essential for managing stress in the work-career environment during the transition from student to employee. The findings of Van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Bakker and Schaufeli (2013) indicated that

adaptability and the ability to draw on appropriate psychological resources to promote overall well-being are a significant predictor of the ability to cope effectively with organisational change.

Apart from the two career harmoniser constructs discussed above, the career enabler dimension of self/other also contributed significantly and positively to the variances across the five coping resources, although once again with a small practical effect size as regards the physical coping resources. The capacity to use one's skill and ability to fully appreciate and understand one's emotions and motivation for taking action, to exert control over own behaviour, as well as to build effective interpersonal relationships in order to attain career success (Coetzee, 2013) appears to underpin the development of the range of coping capacities which may be accessed during times of stress. This finding suggests that the respondents were able to use their skills within their unique socio-cultural context to boost their overall well-being.

The results further indicate that the level of coping resources of individuals may also be attributed to the career preference of stability/expertise and the career harmonisers construct of social connectivity. This, in turn, implies that the enduring cognitive structures underlying career action and the mechanism which is responsible for driving the preference for stable and predictable work with opportunities to develop expertise, which was typical of the life stage of the sample, coupled with the ability to build meaningful social connections, are likely to influence the capacity to use a confident sense of self-worth, positive views about others and a general optimism about life to bolster career resilience (stronger coping resources). Optimism is an essential component of the career resilience which enables rising above career disappointments and continuing to perform during periods of intense change. Optimism therefore enhances the ability to rise to the developmental challenges which are characteristic of the early career phase (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2007; Van Vuuren & Fourie, 2000). The results suggest that these psychological career resources are likely to boost the cognitive-behavioural support provided by the use of social networks and societal connectivity during times of stress and feelings of being overwhelmed (Sortheix et al., 2013).

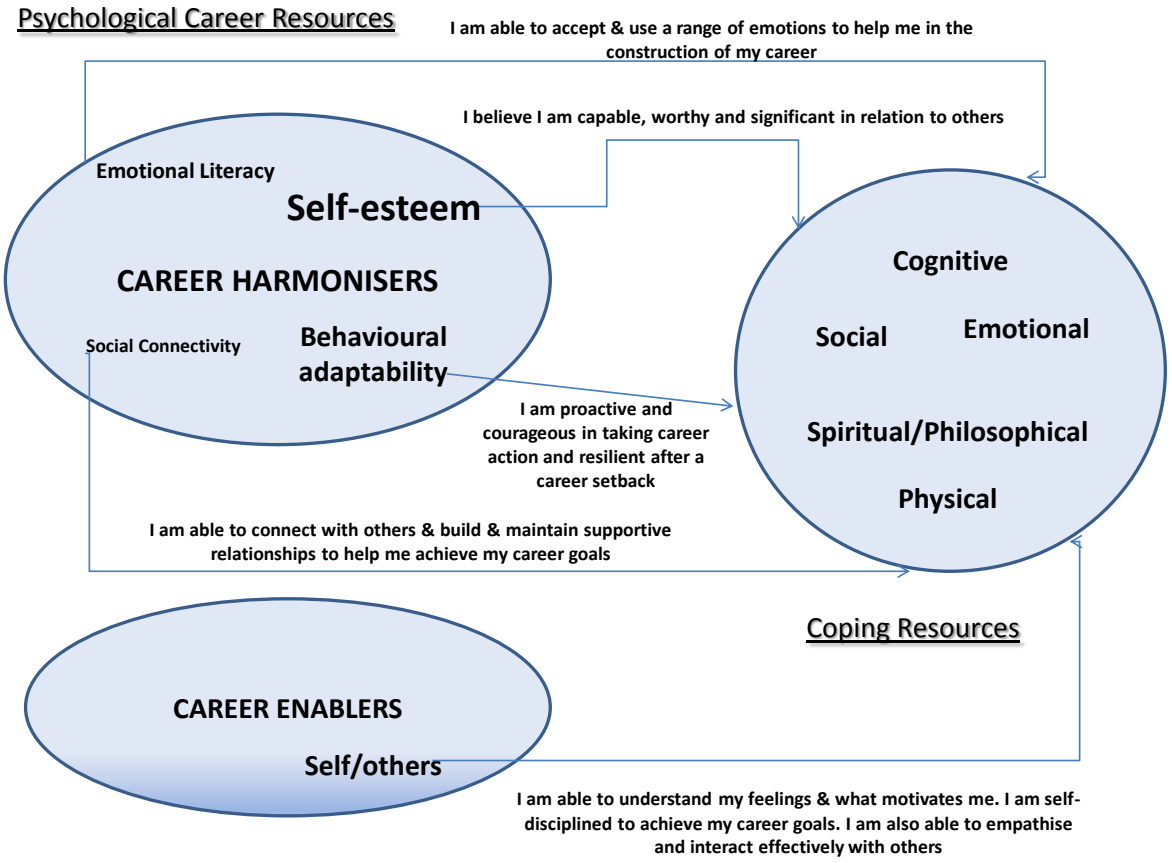

Figure 3.8: Illustration of the relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources

The social coping resources of the participants also appeared to be influenced by the career value of growth/development and the career harmonisers construct of emotional literacy. The intrinsic motivation to seek out growth and development opportunities at the start of a career supports proactive career behaviour and is an important psychological career resource (Coetzee, 2013). Both acceptance and the use of a range of emotional responses during the career construction processes appear to make a positive contribution to changes in the social coping resource dimension. This may be due to the fact that an enhanced understanding of and control over feelings auger well for building personal relationships while also increasing the ability to know when to ask for assistance from others.

Of all the coping resources, the social coping resources appear to be significantly influenced by the career drivers of career purpose and career directedness. This suggests that a vocational calling, linked to broader societal obligations and a desire to use a career to give back to the community, coupled with a clear career vision and direction as well as an understanding of where and how to access important career information, drives the ability to access social networks and draw on the support of others when required. It would appear

that the influence of significant others on the career development process, whilst common to the experiences of most young graduates, is a more integral component of a collectivist orientation and also promotes the confidence to pursue career goals (Cheung, Wan, Fan, Leong & Mok, 2013).

This study also shows that the career harmonisers of social connectivity account for significant differences in emotional coping resource scores. It is likely that the act of truly connecting with other people, building and preserving jointly supportive relationships and learning from others in the process of attaining career goals enhance emotional resilience and the capacity to access and use a range of emotions in order to cope with the negative consequences of stress.

The results of this study indicate that drawing on guiding values derived from tradition, culture and personal viewpoints helps the individual concerned to make sense of stressful situations (Hammer & Marting, 1987). This response is enhanced by an understanding of the individual's unique socio-cultural context, the individual's capacity for self-understanding, effective interaction with others as well as the ability to access appropriate career promoting and self-regulatory behaviours in order to pursue clear career goals (Coetzee, 2013). It is possible that the future orientation of career directedness helps to create meaning for the individual and enhances hopefulness about a broader career plan which is yet to materialise and this, in turn, boosts the spiritual/philosophical coping resource.

All the statistically significant relationships between the psychological career resources and physical coping showed a small practical effect size. The strongest relationship existed between the career harmoniser of self-esteem (see discussion above). Other influencing variables include the career enabler of career directedness and the career harmonisers of behavioural adaptability and social connectivity. It is likely that self-confidence, hope about a future career and the adaptability required to attain objectives, coupled with the ability to develop supportive interpersonal relationships, promote an appreciation of the benefits of healthy behaviours and a willingness to participate in such activities in order to enhance physical health and overall well-being.

3.4.3 Differences between gender groups

As suggested in the literature review, the empirical results showed that female participants demonstrated a more frequent use of emotional coping resources than their male counterparts, thus indicating a greater readiness and ability to accept and then use the expression of a range of emotion in order to manage stressful situations. Although this study did not find significant differences between the genders as regards the social coping

resources this was not the case with Zeidner and Hammer (1990; 1992). Their findings also showed that the female participants were also more likely than the male participants to use the spiritual/philosophical coping resource, drawing on their value systems to derive meaning from a stressful event and using their tradition, culture and unique beliefs to guide their response to the stressor. This result is supported by the findings of Krok (2008) who revealed that woman are more likely than men to access spiritual forms of coping when under strain.

In this study, it emerged that the male participants were more likely than the females to use health promoting behaviours (e.g. exercise) to mitigate the negative effects of stress (Physical coping resource). This result is consistent with the findings of Zeidner and Hammer (1990; 1992).

Heiman (2004) and Krok (2008) found that women utilised more emotion-based coping approaches than men. These results are consistent with the research carried out on South African teachers by Coetzee, Jansen and Muller (2009). They found that females have higher level of social and emotional coping resources than males. However, they found no significant differences in the spiritual/philosophical coping resources of men and women.

These results are consistent with the findings of Zeidner and Hammer (1990; 1992), who reported higher total coping resources scores, higher social coping resources and higher emotional coping resources scores for females as compared to males. However, males scored significantly higher on physical coping resources than females.

Significant differences existed between the male and female participants in terms of the psychological career resources of career drivers and career harmonisers and, more specifically, in terms of emotional literacy and social connectivity. In all cases the female participants obtained higher scores than the males. This suggests that the women participants possessed a stronger and more focused career calling, greater self-confidence and willingness to take risks to access career opportunities than the men. They would, thus, be more likely than men to achieve balance in their lives, accomplish career objectives and avoid burnout during this transitional phase by the intelligent use of a range of emotions for behavioural adaptation and the development and maintenance of appropriate and supportive social networks.

This result is somewhat consistent with the findings of Coetzee (2008b). Coetzee (2008b) found significant gender differences between all the career preferences and career values, the practical/creative skills construct of career enablers and the career harmonisers variables of self-esteem, emotional stability and social stability. However, no significant differences were found between the career drivers, the career enablers variable of self/other skills and

career harmonisers construct of behavioural adaptability. These differences highlight the need to consider gender when developing career counselling interventions as it is clear that the career development needs of men and women are different.

3.4.4 Differences between employment status groups

The findings of this study showed no significant differences in the coping resources between those young graduates who had had exposure to employment opportunities (part-time experience) and those who had had no experience with working.

Notwithstanding this outcome, there is some evidence in the literature to suggest that non-employed young people are more likely to access emotion based coping resources than their working counterparts and they are also generally less stressed than the latter group (Heiman, 2004; Krok, 2008).

Those participants who had had some work experience had higher scores on the career drivers construct of career venturing and on the career harmonisers construct of behavioural adaptability than their counterparts who had had no work experience at all. It is likely that, through some exposure to and an understanding of working in an organisation, the young graduate's awareness of career opportunities increases. In addition, through observation of others, young graduates are able to identify the qualities essential for success and the way in which personal behaviour must be adapted to achieve career related goals. This, in turn, builds the confidence required to take appropriate career risks. This finding highlights the inherent benefits of part time work for young graduates.

No other studies have looked directly at the impact of employment status on psychological career resources as defined in Coetzee's (2007; 2013) theoretical framework. However, Maggiori et al. (2013) using Savickas's (2005) career adaptability model of concern, control, curiosity and confidence, found significant differences in the career adaptability scores of their employed and unemployed participants, with the latter group obtaining higher adaptability scores and lower general well-being scores than their employed counterparts. This study also considered the negative impact of prolonged periods of unemployment and the potential for reduced ability to engage these adaptability resources over time. The effects of unemployment on the young graduate's capacity over time to engage in proactive career behaviour remains an issue of considerable concern and merits further investigation

3.5 Conclusions: implications for practice

An understanding of the psychological career resources profile of individuals and how this relates to their career adaptability is a useful counselling tool for understanding unique career

patterns, vocational decision making and the process of work adjustment (Savickas, 2005). In addition, it is essential that both the gender and employment status of the individual be taken into account as this research study has shown that significant differences exist between these groups. An understanding of psychological career resources may also be used to help clients gain insight into and become aware of their dominant career consciousness and the way in which this impacts on their subjective work experiences and overall career construction. This understanding will, in turn, encourage and motivate clients to engage in appropriate career-related activities and deal with the inevitable setbacks this process entails (Coetzee, 2013). The psychological career resources profile highlights areas of developmental concern as well as points of optimal functioning. This study has also demonstrated the relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources. It follows, thus, that, enhancing psychological career resources would be likely to impact on general coping resources. This, in turn, is likely to contribute positively to overall well-being, ongoing career adaptability and meaningful career construction throughout the career life span.

3.6 Limitations of the study

The main limitations only will be discussed in the following section because a comprehensive overview of all the limitations identified is provided in Chapter 4.

Exploratory research of this nature has significant limitations in terms of determining the causation of the relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources. The relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources has been "interpreted rather than established" (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2012, p.825). In view of the fact that the study was limited to early career, unemployed, black graduates who were attending a Work Readiness Programme within a specific sector, caution should also be exercised in generalising the findings beyond the scope of the study. Further research is required into unemployed graduates in general while an additional investigation into the impact of demographic variables (e.g. race, marital status) on the nature of this relationship is required. In addition, longitudinal studies should be conducted to assess the relationship between the psychological career resources of individuals and their coping resources over time as the career self-concept tends to evolve as people gain more work experience (Schein, 1990).

The influence of tertiary education on the relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources was not measured in this study. It is likely that this factor may contribute to higher levels of proactivity and career engagement (Converse, Pathak, DePaul-Haddock, Gotlib & Merbedone, 2012) than one may possibly see in a sample of non-

graduates. It is, thus, not possible to draw conclusions about young non graduates from this study.

3.6.1 Recommendations for future research

The main recommendations only will be highlighted in this section. Chapter 4 contains a detailed discussion of the recommendations for future research.

In view of the limited scope of this study, further research to investigate causation is required, as is the need to replicate the study in wider samples which would include unemployed young graduates who were *not* participating in a Work Readiness Programme, employed people at different stages of their careers and other race groups besides black people. Only once this has been done would it be possible to draw broader conclusions about the nature of the relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources. In addition, longitudinal studies are required to investigate the way in which the relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources changes over time with exposure to the work environment and changing life roles.

3.7 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the central features of the literature review and the empirical study were discussed, the research findings were interpreted using appropriate statistical analyses, conclusions were drawn, the limitations of the study highlighted and recommendations made for about future research.

Chapter 4 presents a comprehensive discussion of the conclusions drawn from the research, as well as the limitations of the study and the application of the findings in practice.

From an empirical perspective, the following research aims have been achieved:

Research aim 1: To explore the nature of the statistical relationship between coping resources and psychological career resources as found in a sample of young, early career, South African graduates in the school-to-work transition phase of their lives

Research aim 2: To explore whether psychological resources positively and significantly predict the coping resources of individuals

Research aim 3: To assess whether individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter concludes the dissertation and follows the research methodology indicated in Chapter 1. In the first section of this chapter conclusions to the study are drawn. A discussion of the limitations of the study follows while the final section of the chapter contains recommendations for career decision-making practices and research in the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology.

4.1 CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO THE DEFINED OBJECTIVES

Chapter 4 focuses on the conclusions drawn from the study. The chapter highlights the limitations of both the literature review and the empirical results, and makes recommendations about the practical application of the findings as well as for future research.

4.1.1 Conclusions regarding the literature review

The study had three aims. Firstly, the literature review aimed to critically explore, analyse and then evaluate the way in which psychological career resources and coping resources are conceptualised in the literature. The second aim was to investigate the nature of the relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources while the third aim was to identify the biographical variables which impact on psychological career resources and coping resources. The general aim of the study was accomplished by addressing and realising the specific aims of the study.

4.1.1.1 The first aim: To investigate the way in which coping resources and psychological career resources are conceptualised in the literature

The first aim, namely, the conceptualisation of psychological career resources and coping resources in the literature and the determination of any theoretical relationships between the two constructs, was attained in Chapter 2. A literature review was conducted to elucidate the central tenets of the two variables. It was concluded from the literature review that, despite the existing body of knowledge on coping resources and the emerging literature on psychological career resources, little information exists on these variables in relation to young, early career graduates entering the workplace for the first time. Thus, further research is needed in order to understand psychological career resources and coping resources in this context.

For the purposes of this study, psychological career resources were conceptualised using Coetzee's (2007) framework. According to this framework career consciousness is achieved and maintained through the use of Career Preferences, Career Values, Career Enablers, Career Drivers and Career Harmonisers. A unique psychological career resources profile emerges for an individual from the interplay of each component of the framework and it is the strength of each component element that impacts on the process of career construction, including the ability to adapt to change and remain resilient in the face of career setbacks. However, further research is required to expand the existing body of knowledge relating to psychological career resources.

Coping resources were defined in terms of Hammer and Marting's (1987) five domain model. The five domains are cognitive coping, social coping, emotional coping, spiritual/philosophical coping and physical coping. The utilisation of these resources during stressful situations is likely both to negate the negative and harmful effects of feeling overwhelmed and to boost an inherent confidence in the ability to overcome obstacles. Types of coping, namely, avoidance and emotion based coping, as well as non-goal orientated acceptance coping were also explored in order to understand fully the nature of coping in the promotion of overall well-being.

4.1.1.2 The second aim: To investigate the nature of the relationship between coping resources and psychological career resources

The role of psychological career resources as a set of meta-competencies in other career-related concepts has already been empirically established and, thus, formed part of the basis of the literature review. Career exploration, adaptability and employability emerged from the extensive literature on careers as the central tenets for career success and these were then considered in relation to psychological career resources. Similarly, based on a vast body of relevant knowledge, coping was understood in relation to the resources which are employed to minimise the negative health effects of stress and the various coping strategies which emanate from each of these resources.

The Psychological Career Resources Framework (Coetzee, 2007) is an emerging conceptualisation of personal agency within the career context (Coetzee, 2013). Consequently, literature on the topic is not as easily available as literature on coping resources. In addition, there is limited recent research on the classical coping resources constructs of Hammer and Marting (1987). As a result of the exploratory nature of this study, no other research exists which investigates the relationship between coping resources and psychological career resources.

4.1.1.3 The third aim: To identify the biographical variables which impact on coping resources and psychological career resources

The literature review revealed a possible influence of gender on both the psychological career resources and coping resources employed during times of stress. Women tend to approach stress with a greater reliance on emotion and social coping resources as compared to men, while men place a greater reliance on physical coping resources. Differences in psychological career resources showed greater behavioural adaptability as regards the achievement of career objectives for women than men.

With the exception of one reference in the literature, employment status did not emerge as a significant factor in accounting for differences in coping resources. However, none of the literature on psychological career resources reports any investigations into the impact of employment status.

4.1.2 Conclusions regarding the empirical study

The empirical aim of the study was to perform the following five principal tasks:

- To explore the nature of the statistical relationship between coping resources and psychological career resources as found in a sample of young, early career, South African graduates in the school-to-work transition phase of their lives. This was achieved by empirically testing research hypothesis H1
- To explore whether psychological career resources positively and significantly predict the coping resources of individuals. This was achieved by empirically testing research hypothesis H2
- To assess whether individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources. This was achieved by empirically testing research hypothesis H3
- To identify the practical implications for career counselling and guidance practices.
- To formulate recommendations for practice and future research

The statistical results of the study provided supportive evidence for the research hypotheses. The findings for each of the research objectives and the hypotheses that merit further discussion will be presented as conclusions.

4.1.2.1 Conclusions regarding research aim 1: To explore the nature of the statistical relationship between coping resources and psychological career resources as found in a sample of young, early career, South African graduates in the school-to-work transition phase of their lives

The results provided supportive evidence for the existence of a statistical relationship between coping resources and psychological career resources. It may be concluded that the psychological career resources of individuals relate positively to higher levels of coping resources. Based on the associations observed between the participants' psychological career resources and coping resources, it is further concluded that self-perceptions of one's psychosocial career resources (as an aspect of the vocational self) strengthen the cognitive-behavioural adaptive capacities as represented by individuals' coping resources.

4.1.2.2 Conclusions regarding research aim 2: To explore whether psychological career resources positively and significantly predict the coping resources of individuals

Overall, the results indicated that the psychological career resource dimensions of career harmonisers contributed significantly and positively to explaining variances in the coping resources of the respondents. It may, thus, be concluded that developing individuals' career harmonisers (self-esteem, behavioural adaptability, emotional literacy and social connectivity) will strengthen their coping resources.

It may further be concluded that well-developed career enablers (practical/creative skills and self/other skills) will positively strengthen the cognitive coping resources of individuals.

4.1.2.3 Conclusions regarding research aim 3: To assess whether individuals from different gender and employment status groups significantly differ in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources

It may be concluded that women demonstrate more frequent usage of emotional coping resources than men, suggesting a greater readiness and ability to accept and then use a range of emotion in order to manage stressful situations. It would also appear that women are more likely than men to use the spiritual/philosophical coping resource, drawing on their value system to derive meaning from the stressful event and using their tradition, culture and unique beliefs to guide their response to the stressor. On the other hand, men appear more likely than women to use health promoting behaviours (e.g. exercise) to mitigate the negative effects of stress (physical coping resource).

It may further be concluded that women have a stronger and more focused career calling, greater self-confidence and willingness to take risks in order to access career opportunities as compared to men. In addition, women are also more likely than men to achieve balance in

their lives, accomplish their career objectives and avoid burnout during this school-to work transition phase by the intelligent use of a range of emotions for the purposes of behavioural adaptation and the development and maintenance of appropriate and supportive social networks.

In terms of employment status, it may be concluded that individuals with no previous work experience and those with work experience do not differ significantly in terms of their coping resources.

It may further be concluded that individuals with work experience tend to have stronger career venturing needs and higher levels of career adaptability than those with no previous work experience. This finding highlights the inherent benefits of part time work for young graduates and raises concerns about the effects of unemployment on the young graduate's capacity to engage in proactive career behaviour over time.

4.1.3 Conclusions regarding the central hypothesis

The study provides evidence in support of the central hypothesis (as outlined in Chapter 1). The relationship between the psychological career resources and the coping resources of a sample of young, early career, black South African graduates was established. In addition, differences between gender and employment status groups in terms of their coping resources and psychological career resources were also established.

4.2 LIMITATIONS

The limitations of the literature study and the empirical investigation are outlined below.

4.2.1 Limitations of the literature review

The most significant limitation in terms of the literature review is the paucity of information on the relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources. This is amplified by the relative theoretical silence on the experiences of young graduates in the South African context in relation to managing stress and coping with early career transitions. However, this study has made a significant contribution to filling the vacuum.

4.2.2 Limitations of the empirical study

Many of the limitations of the study have been identified in the previous chapters and, thus, what follows is a summary of the specific limitations applicable to the empirical study only. These include the specific biographical characteristics of the sample which prevent the findings being generalised to other groups. In addition, the use of self-report methodology

makes it impossible to test the efficacy of the use of the psychological career resources and coping resources. Longitudinal studies are required to establish causation and to understand the way in which the nature of the relationship between the two variables changes over time. Future research needs to focus on unemployed graduates who are not in a Work Readiness Programme, as well as participants of all race groups.

In short, however, despite these limitations, this study has established that there is a relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources. This, in turn, reinforces the role of psychological career resources as meta-competencies and highlights the importance of the career construction process as a means for optimising healthy human functioning during times of stress.

The fact that the data was entirely self-reported is an important limitation. It would, thus, be useful to find other ways in which to obtain and validate data. It was not possible for the study to measure either the impact of participation in the Work Readiness programme on both psychological career resources and coping resources or the relationship between the two constructs. Further research is needed to fully understand the influence of such a programme on these research outcomes.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, conclusions and limitations of this study, recommendations for industrial and organisational psychology and further research in the field are outlined in the sections below.

4.3.1 Recommendations regarding career counselling and guidance

On a practical level, an understanding of psychological career resources and coping resources, both of which may be measured, may help the young, early career person to identify and access the psycho-social resources that are more readily available (higher scores) and that may be quickly deployed in order to meet career transition challenges (Sternberg, 2003). In view of the fact that career counselling does not take place within an emotionally neutral context, a key outcome of the counselling session should be to facilitate effective coping through the development of appropriate coping behaviours and, in the process, reduce defensiveness, anxiety and stress and increase positive affect overall (Emmerling & Cherniss, 2003).

Collectively, this approach has the added benefit of increasing self-esteem as the focus is not on deficiencies but on strengths that may be capitalised upon. This also provides a valuable opportunity to discuss meta-competencies and ways in which they may be

strengthened (Zeidner & Ben-Zur, 1994). From a clinical perspective, Zeidner and Hammer (1990) report that interventions should initially be targeted at moderate level resources rather than those at the lowest levels, as the latter are difficult to develop in a short period of time and difficulties in this area may serve only to increase frustration and a sense of inadequacy and, in the process, this may become an added stressor for the young person.

Depending on the level of coping resources, the psychological career resources profile and the unique relationship between these two variables, namely, coping resources and psychological career resources, career exploration, employability and career adaptability will be affected in varying degrees and this will either promote or retard the individual's ability to cope with the related career transitions.

Interventions designed to promote career exploration may include exposure to job simulations, on-the-job work experience, part-time work and volunteering at community centres or charities (Savickas, 2005). Such activities are likely both to increase openness to new experiences and opportunities and to promote the self-discovery that underpins this central career tenet of openness (Sortheix et al., 2013). Employability will be enhanced by experiences aimed at increasing self-confidence, stimulating proactivity and self-responsibility and learning how to be comfortable working in a more autonomous way (Koen et al., 2012). Work Readiness Programmes and a mentorship under an experienced person may be important ways in which to develop this capacity in the young graduate.

This study has shown that career harmonisers and the career enabler of self/other skills are key psychological career resources for enhancing coping resources and the overall well-being of young people as they enter the world of work. Interventions designed to increase these psycho-social capacities are likely to encourage proactive career behaviours during the school-to-work transition. There is evidence in longitudinal studies in the literature to suggest that the way in which individuals take responsibility for their individual career management during the first year of employment is critical for long term objective and subjective career success (De Vos et al., 2009).

As illustrated in Figure 4.1, counselling sessions should facilitate the process of building self-confidence, increasing self-acceptance and promoting problem solving skills. Such sessions should also include teaching young people how to recognise emotion in both themselves and others and how to use this understanding to enhance performance. Personal responsibility for actions, increased self-awareness and greater behavioural flexibility are all likely to boost coping capacity within the workplace and promote proactive career behaviours.

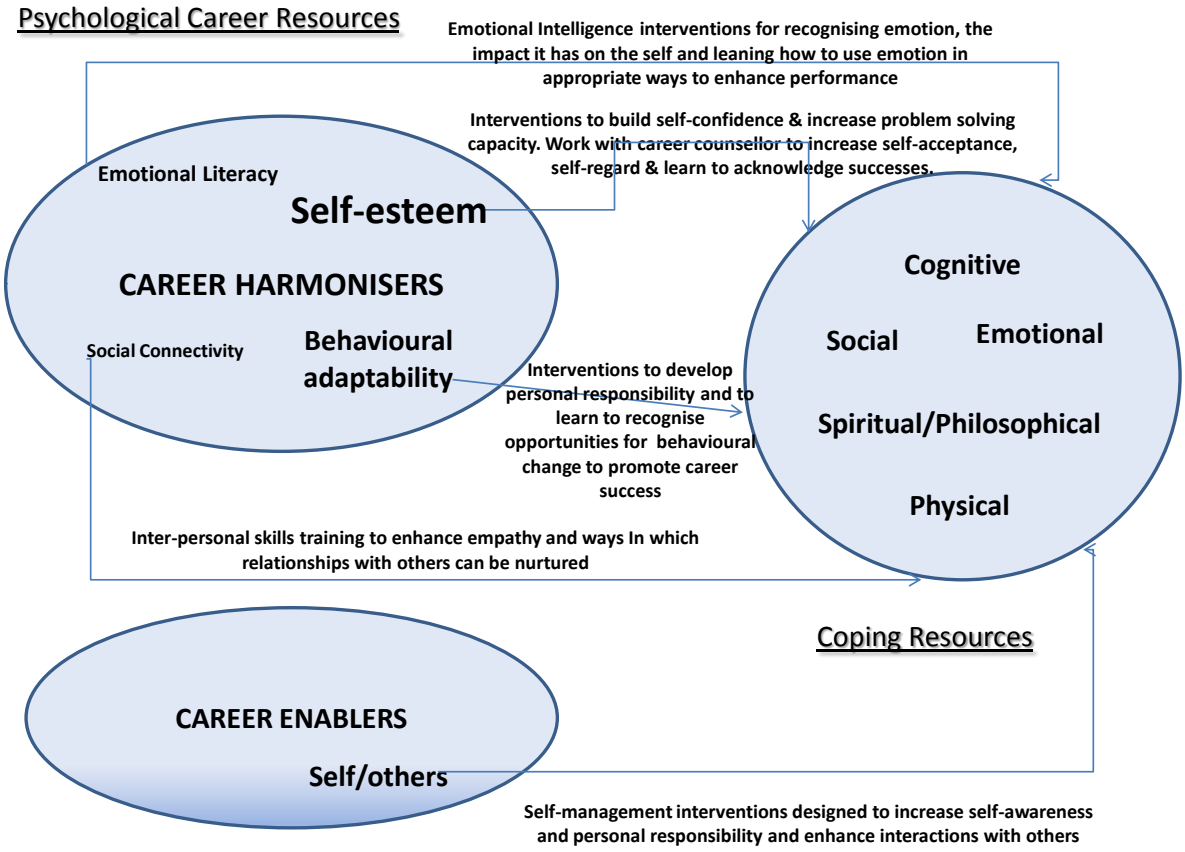

*Figure 4.1:*Counselling interventions to enhance significant psychological career resources

In view of the gender differences in coping resources and psychological career resources, it is essential that the counselling context consider the impact of gender on the subjective experiences of the young graduate in terms of the strength of the resources upon which weaker capacities may be built.

Counselling the unemployed, especially the long term unemployed, raises challenges in respect of the loss of a career identity, remaining hopeful in the face of despair and providing structure to the job search process. Job search skills (which include learning how to write a curriculum vitae, responding to job advertisements and interview skills) as well as learning how to seek out and be receptive to all career opportunities, are key components of finding employment (Koen et al., 2012). Young people should be encouraged to become involved in the community and to look for entrepreneurial ways in which to create a career for themselves. This level of active engagement is likely to increase self-esteem which, as this research has shown, is a crucial meta-competency for overall well-being and effective career management.

4.3.2 Recommendations for industrial psychologists working in the field of careers and career counselling

Industrial psychologists have a role to play in working with organisations in understanding and managing the changing nature of the individual-work interface. The development of psychological career resources in young people is an important component of helping to facilitate effective career planning, manage career disruptions and, in the process, increase the likelihood of individual adaptability and flexibility. Both the latter are vital for positive occupational attitudes and overall organisational success (Creed & Hughes, 2013; Creed et al., 2011). This research has highlighted the need to merge the distinct perspectives of employee focused vocational psychology with those of employer focused industrial psychology through organisational support for career development. This, typically, comprises formal strategies of career planning, supervisor support, training, assessment, development opportunities and counselling as well as more informal interventions such as coaching, mentoring and networking opportunities (Barnett & Bradley, 2007). This also serves as a reminder to industrial psychologists of the importance of employee well-being for organisational profitability and this, in turn, must be communicated to the employer (Diener & Seligman, 2004).

4.3.3 Recommendations for further research

In light of the conclusions and limitations of this study, the recommendations below should be considered for the purposes of future research.

- An investigation into the impact of long-term unemployment of the South African graduate population on employability and overall well-being as well as the identification of the types of psycho-social support required to enable this population to cope. In addition, there is a need to identify the types of programmes which are required for retraining in order to improve employability and the ability to compete in the labour market (Koen et al., 2012; Lim, 2010)
- Research into the psychological career resources and coping resources of unemployed graduates who have not participated in Work Readiness Programmes
- Further research into the efficacy of Work Readiness Programmes and ways in which effective career development may be offered during this kind of intervention
- Further research into the predictors of employability in the South African context (Lim, 2010)
- Further research into the differences between the nature of the relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources on the part of men and

women in order to increase our understanding of the different support required by each (Nicholls et al., 2007)

- Further research into the way in which gender and employment status impact on the degree of access to and the type of resources employed by the individual. This recommendation highlights the need for the development of gender specific counselling interventions (Minten, 2010) as well as a differentiation between the employed and unemployed, especially when the focus is on well-being and stress management
- Further research into the impact of increased years of unemployment on psychological career resources and coping resources and an investigation into the interventions required to minimise the negative impact of this societal reality
- Longitudinal studies to investigate the way in which the relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources changes in the course of a career
- Research to ensure a deeper understanding of the nature of social coping resources and the way in which they are used in the South African context. In view of the high unemployment rate in South Africa and the degree to which much of the extended family's survival hinges on the employment of the young graduate, the consequent health implications of this ever-present demand to support and help others in the family needs to be explored and understood.
- The literature review highlighted the need for cross-cultural sensitivity when working with young graduates as career exploration is grounded in a cultural context. An understanding of collectivist versus individualistic cultures is essential for identifying relevant cultural patterns in the counselling setting and for helping young people to understand how their cultural influences have shaped their career thinking (Fan et al., 2012; Flores, 2008). Further research into this phenomenon is required in the South African setting
- Further research into the relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources of all the racial groups in South Africa

4.4 INTEGRATION OF THE RESEARCH

This study was conducted on the premise that individuals are active agents in their own lives and their behaviour is, therefore, adapted to optimise psychological functioning and overall life satisfaction. Individuals experience inner well-being when they use their inherent capacities in order to be effective and masterful, when they become connected to and integrated within broader communities and when they are able to self-organise and self-

regulate their behaviour in flexible and appropriate ways so as to exert control over both themselves and their environment (Converse et al., 2012; Deci & Ryan, 2000). The process of career construction is a fundamental expression of this adaptive process as individuals derive purpose and meaning from the development of a career (Savickas, 2005). Psychological career resources and coping resources guide a lifetime of values, decisions and choices and help to promote well-being against a backdrop of constant change. Throughout the emergence of a career, psychological career resources and coping resources are employed to facilitate self-expression and to ensure a stable self-concept and career identity (Coetzeee & Esterhuizen, 2010).

The general aim of this research was to investigate the relationship between the psychological career resources and the coping resources of individuals in the school-to-work transition phase of their lives and to assess whether individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly regarding their psychological career and coping resources.

The literature review established that coping resources are important cognitive-behavioural mechanisms for dealing effectively with the stress generated during this transitional phase of an early career. Equal access to and the ability to employ the full range of coping responses, as conceptualised by Hammer and Marting (1987), is likely to enhance coping flexibility, promote career resilience and adaptability and build up confidence in the ability to manage stressors and not be overwhelmed by the significant task of constructing a career (Cheng, 2003; Johnston et al., 2013).

A solid resource base is fundamental for the development of coping strategies – the actions an individual will take to reduce the harmful effects of a stressor. Without effective resources, strategies are unlikely to become well-developed and this will, in turn, significantly retard the young person's capacity to manage the myriad of demands he/she will encounter upon entering the work place (Ito & Brotheridge, 2003). In addition, gender and employment status are likely to impact on the degree of access to and type of resources employed by the individual.

A significant portion of the literature on careers shows that the fundamental tenets of a career in the 21st century are effective career exploration, employability and adaptability. The ability to nurture an unique career identity, discover congruent career opportunities and be courageous in pursuing these opportunities as well as displaying a high degree of flexibility and resilience during the process, is likely to support career success (Coetzee, 2013; Savickas, 2005). Psychological career resources are seen as the career meta-competencies

that support this ability. The relationship between psychological career resources, as conceptualised by Coetzee (2008a, 2013), and coping resources, as theorised by Hammer and Marting (1987), has not been established in the literature. Although gender differences in the use of psychological career resources were predicted in the literature, the literature was, however, silent on the impact of employment status.

The empirical study indicated clear preferences for the use of the coping resources selected and also differences in the use of coping resources based on gender. However, differences as a result of employment status were not established. This requires further and more intensive investigation in order to understand fully the type of support which unemployed, young graduates require as they actively seek out work opportunities (Koen et al., 2012).

The results showed the unequal use of psychological career resources. This, in turn, has important implications for the way in which the central principles of a contemporary career will be experienced by young graduates, with significant gender based and employment status differences, influencing the final outcomes.

The relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources was empirically established with the career harmonisers constructs of self-esteem, behavioural adaptability, social connectivity and emotional literacy together with the career enablers dimension of self/other skills being the independent variables contributing significantly to variances in the coping resources scores. This result confirms the role of psychological career resources as important meta-competencies in the development of the overall well-being of the young, graduate group as they embark on focused career construction, often in the absence of any exposure to formal employment opportunities and once employed, they have to make the transition from job seeker to new employee.

In view of the fact that this study has demonstrated a significant relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources, there is an obvious need for the development of programmes to help young people become aware of, and then develop, both their psychological career resources and coping resources in order to enable them to make appropriate career choices and effectively engage in health promoting behaviours to manage the stress associated with the transition from university to the workplace and, in the process, actively develop a career identity. A career identity is grounded in self-belief, motivation, cognition, action and the ability to cope with varied situational demands. Both psychological career resources and coping resources are useful resources in understanding how this identity is formed and the strength of its development as well as for establishing the further resources which are needed for career success (Valcour & Ladge, 2008).

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the psychosocial resources employed by young people. These insights may be used in the career counselling setting to improve the type of support provided as well as the quality of the interventions, while taking into account gender and employment status. This research study has also highlighted the role the organisation plays as an important site for the development of psychological career resources. By implication, the organisation is, thus, a key participant in overall employee well-being. The exploratory nature of this work provides a rich source of further investigation in order to expand the understanding of the interrelationship between career construction, unemployment, job seeking, psychological career resources, coping resources and overall well-being during times of intense transition and adjustment.

4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter drew conclusions, indicated the possible limitations of the study both in terms of the literature review and the empirical study, and made recommendations for a supportive career development process for young graduates, as well as providing direction for future research. Finally, literature support for the relationship between psychological career resources and coping resources, including the relevant biographical variables (gender and employment status) was integrated with the broader research.

The following research aims were achieved:

Research aim 1: To explore the nature of the statistical relationship between coping resources and psychological career resources as found in a sample of young, early career, South African graduates in the school-to-work transition phase of their lives

Research aim 2: To explore whether psychological career resources positively and significantly predict the coping resources of individuals

Research aim 3: To assess whether individuals from different gender and employment status groups differ significantly in terms of their psychological career resources and coping resources

Research aim 4: To identify the practical implications for career counselling and guidance practices

Research aim 5: To formulate recommendations for practice and future research.

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